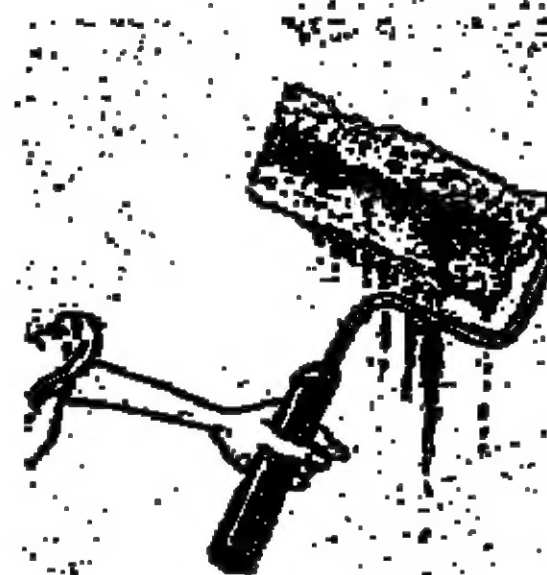




Unlearned lessons

'We saw on our tour that developers have made the same five basic mistakes as they did 10 years ago'

Page 2



Painting mad

'What were we discussing? Violence? Drugs? Sex? No, just the craze among the young for decorating their rooms'

Page 6



On the move

'Belgravia, SW1, is always pricey, whether you are buying a whole house or a pub'

Page 9

Marching down again

Prices in the capital have fallen from all-time peaks. Anne Spackman looks at what their next move might be

First, the good news. If you own a property in London it is almost certainly worth far more than you paid for it, unless you are a very recent purchaser.

Now, the bad news. It is equally likely to be worth less now than nine months ago and its value may fall further over the winter.

Most honest estate agents say values have fallen on average by between 5 and 10 per cent from their peak. In some cases, the falls appear to be 20 or even 30 per cent, but that is usually where the original asking price was ludicrously ambitious.

This downturn in the market comes against a background of substantial growth. Central London property prices rose by almost 100 per cent from the end of 1992 to the end of 1997. Areas beyond the prime heartlands continued to see some growth in spring this year.

But in July the entire market hit the buffers. The first news of redundancies in the UK for several years, coupled with turmoil on the world's stock markets, stopped the property market in its tracks.

November has seen a slight improvement, as the feared global meltdown failed to materialise, but most central London estate agents say they do not expect to see more than a handful of sales this side of Christmas.

FPDSavills recorded the first fall for six years in its central London index in the third quarter of this year.

Officially it predicts a further two per cent off in the fourth quarter, followed by a further five per cent, mostly in the early part of next year. This comes from the only team which correctly predicted London's boom.

As figures from the Nationwide Building Society show, London property has become too expensive.

REGION BY REGION

On pages 2-5, Anne Spackman examines the market in and around London

sive, Greater London and the outer Metropolitan area are the only two parts of the UK where prices are above their long-term trend. London prices are now at a 20 per cent premium to the rest of the south-east - the same level recorded in the boom of the late 1980s.

Although the Nationwide measures prices across London well below peak 1990s levels in real terms, there are some exceptions. Detailed studies by London Residential Research show that some new properties in prime locations such as Kensington have exceeded 1990s prices, even taking inflation into account.

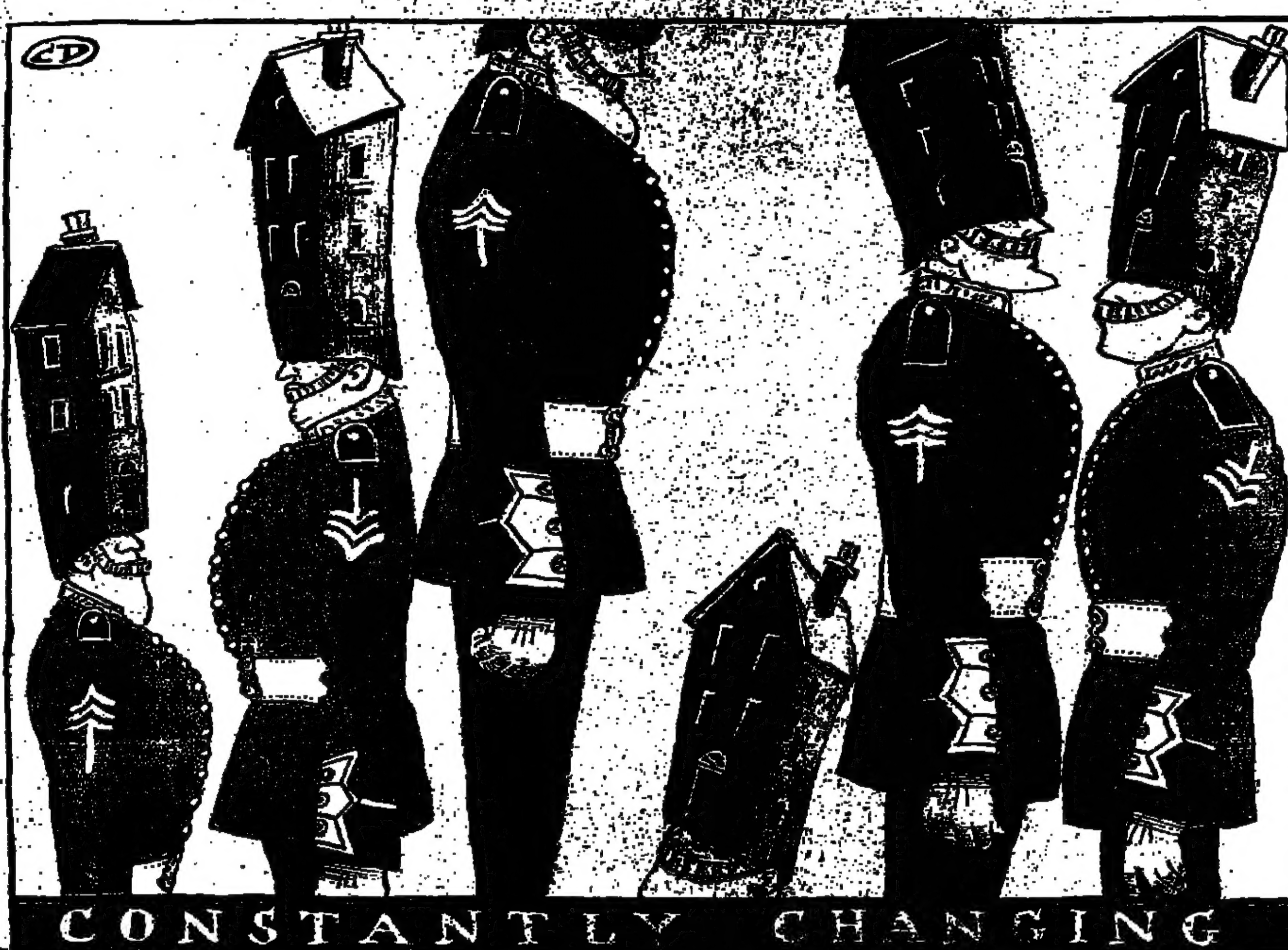
The very top of the market appears to have been hit hardest. Sales over the £2m mark have virtually stopped; at this level all purchases are discretionary and almost all purchasers are shrewd. Although new developments have predictably suffered, they do not look any more overpriced than some of the grandest, second-hand properties.

The Kensington townhouse priced at £2.5m (which was worth less than £1m in 1983), is expected to need a similar price cut to achieve a sale as the flat in a converted office block in Docklands.

Some estate agents are complaining that the market has been ruined by talk of gloom and doom, rather than genuinely worsening economic circumstances. Whether fears of a recession are well-founded or not, many buyers have decided to wait and see what next year will bring.

And what will it bring? There are fewer doom-mongers in the property world than there were a few weeks ago, largely because of the performance of world stock markets. The most commonly held view among experts is that price falls will be short and sharp over the autumn and winter.

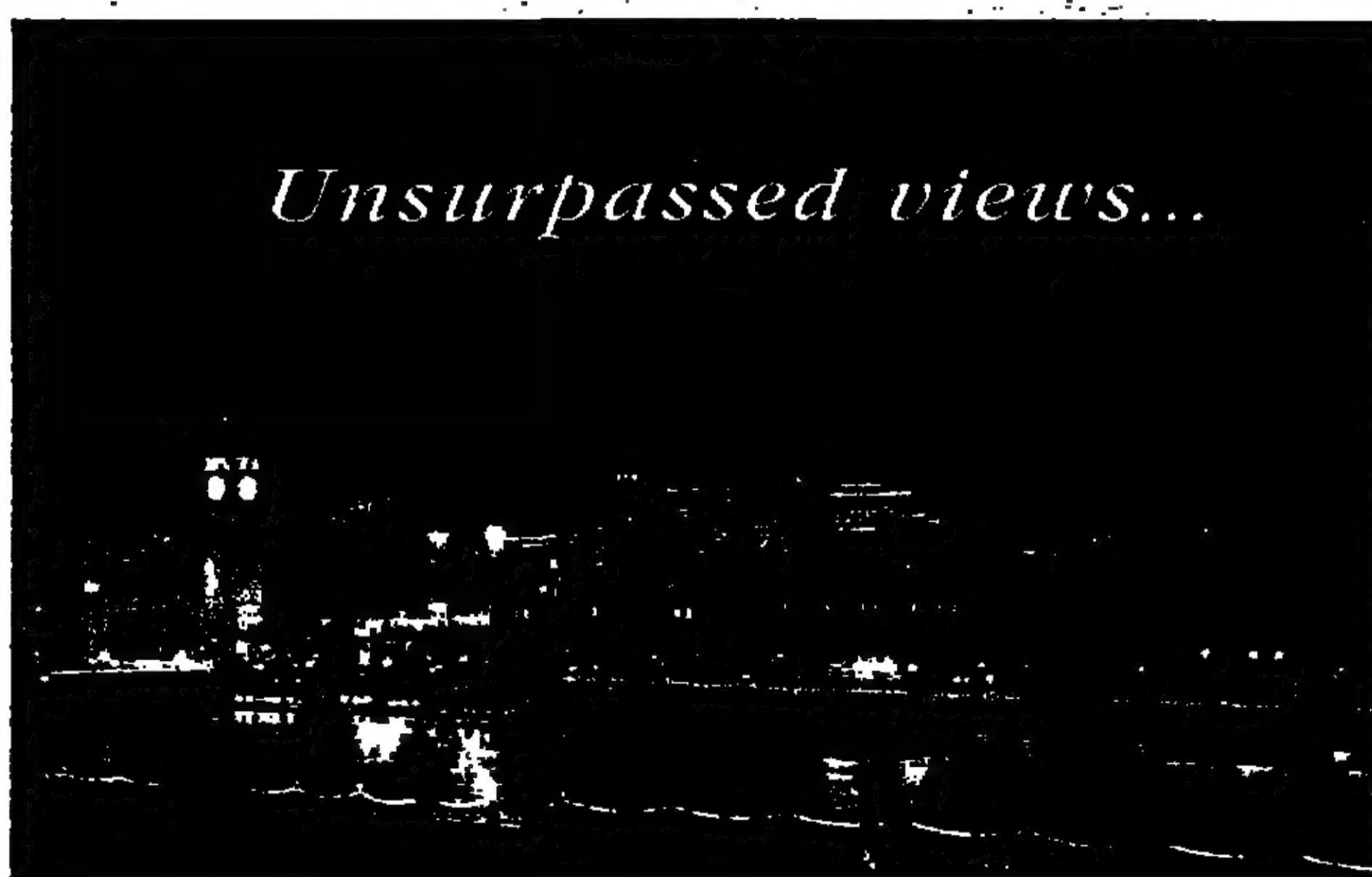
Once that correction has taken place, they believe buyers will come back in, attracted by lower prices and cheaper borrowing. If there is further economic turbulence, however, the market could be in for a longer and deeper correction.



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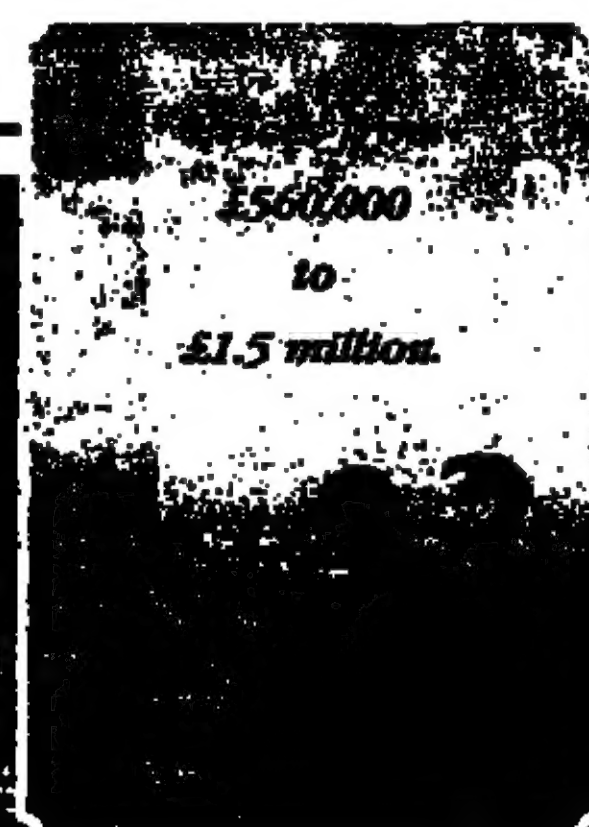
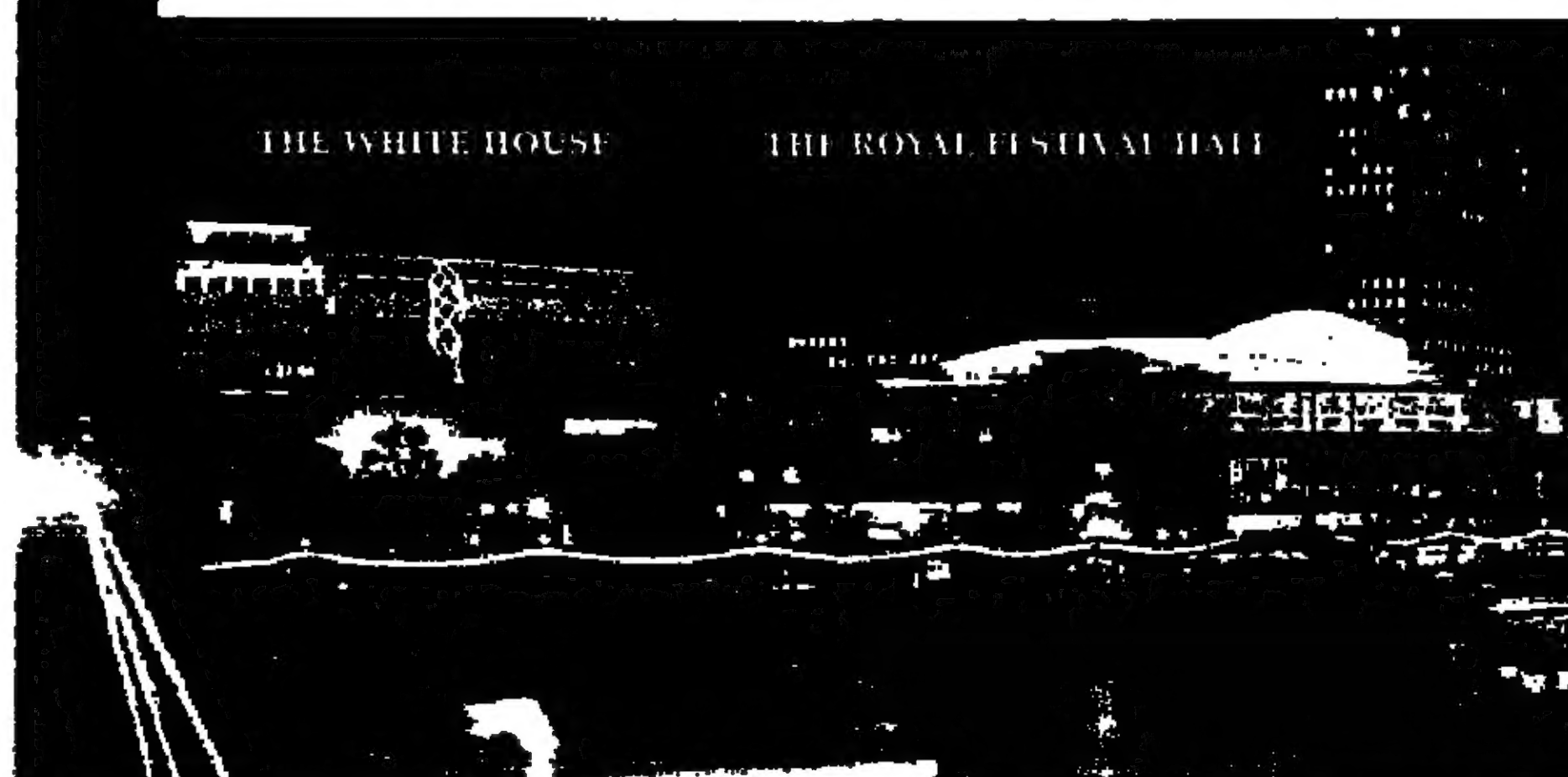
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مركز امين الاصل

Israel and Palestinians ready for Jerusalem talks

By Judy Dempsey in Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians will next week begin "final status" negotiations on the future of Jerusalem and other issues, after Israel yesterday completed a phased handover of West Bank land to Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority.

In a subdued handover -

the first negotiated by a rightwing Likud government - Israeli troops passed 3 per cent of the land over to Palestinian rule and a further 7.1 per cent to its full control, as part of the Wye accord signed last month in Washington.

It involved the Authority taking full responsibility for 60,000 Palestinians living in

several small villages and rural communities around the north West Bank city of Jenin.

For the Israeli military, the handover was a relief. "Frankly, it's a relief not to be running their lives," said an Israeli officer. "It has only caused us grief and trouble. I hope the process continues."

The handover is the first of three to be completed within the next three months, along with the release of 150 Palestinian prisoners, the opening of Gaza's new international airport, the establishment of a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank and the opening of an industrial estate in Gaza.

Yesterday, as part of the first phase, Israel released 250 prisoners. This is seen as one of the most emotional issues for Palestinians, especially as 3,000 prisoners still remain in Israeli jails. The event, however, was marred by Israel's decision to include with the 100 political prisoners 150 Palestinian criminals, some of whom

were in any case due to be released in the coming days. In Gaza, the protocol for opening the airport was signed, ending two years of negotiations over security arrangements. Mr. Arafat said the first flight would arrive on Tuesday, from Egypt.

Meanwhile, Ariel Sharon, Israel's foreign minister, is

preparing to start "final status" negotiations, with the Palestinian side led by Mohammad Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen. These talks will focus on Jerusalem as well as the Jewish settlements, Israel's borders, water and refugees.

Stephen Vidler adds from Washington: The US has announced plans for a con-

ference to help raise billions of dollars in new financial assistance for the Palestinians. Fifty governments and multilateral organisations have been invited to the meeting, to be held in Washington on November 30 and chaired by Madeleine Albright, secretary of state.

Man in the news, Page 7

Ghost grain helps China meet its production targets

Fake harvest reports in pursuit of an 8% growth pledge recall the days of the Great Leap Forward, reports James Harding

When Zhu Rongji toured eastern China earlier this year to inspect the provincial grain stores, he must have welcomed the sight of depots full to the brim. All the more unwelcome, therefore, have been the reports over the last week that in the case of at least one granary, the healthy stock of rice was an elaborate hoax to dupe the prime minister.

In the poor agricultural province of Anhui that sits along the lower reaches of the Yangtze river, the managers of a loss-making grain company borrowed more than 1,000 tonnes of rice and spent more than RMB100,000 (\$12,000) transporting grain from neighbouring stores to show that all was going according to plan when Mr Zhu, the prime minister, visited in June. The grain was later returned, leaving the storerooms empty.

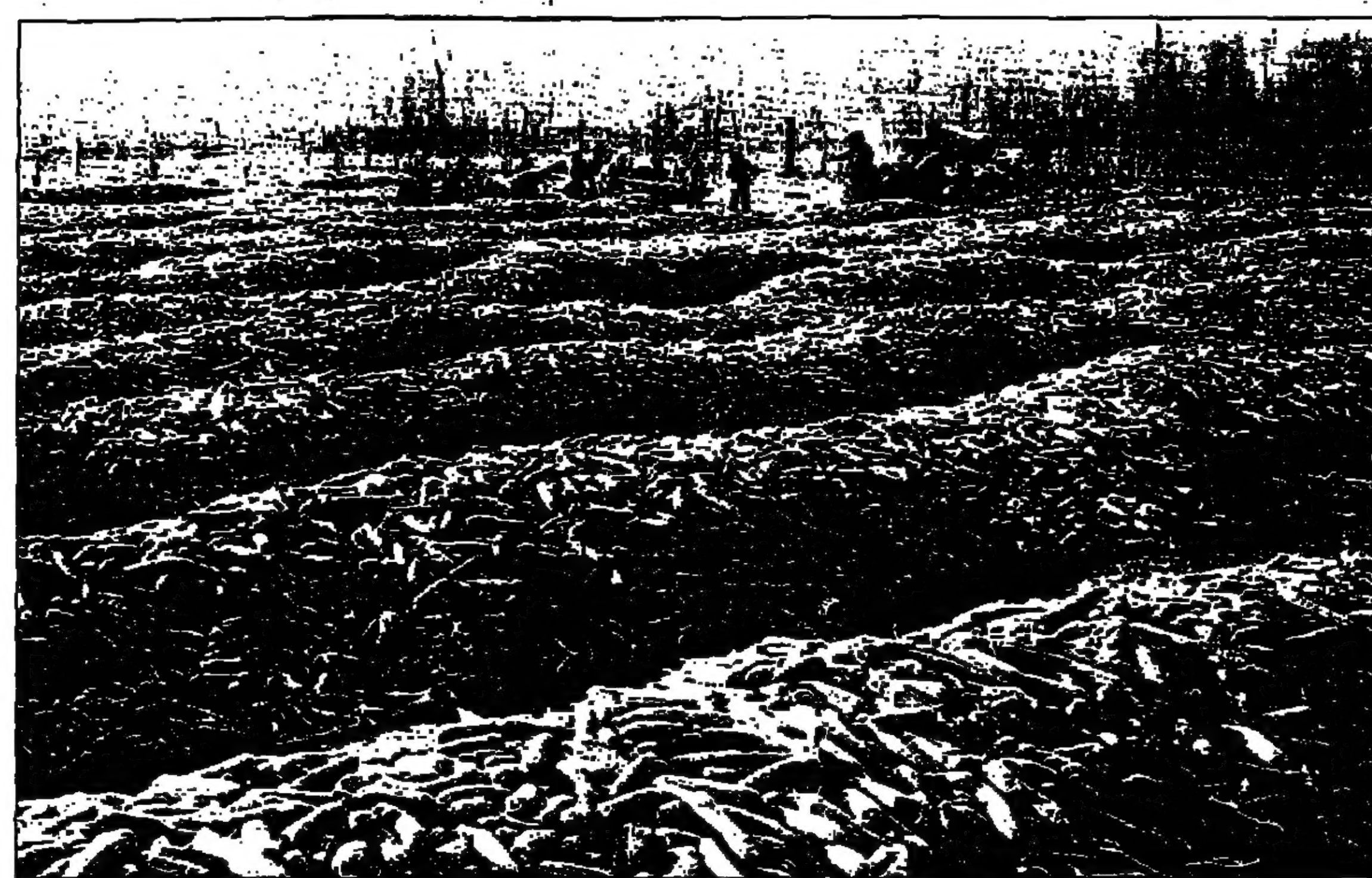
Provincial Chinese officials had an extraordinary record when it comes to fabricating data to please party cadres up the hierarchy. But, as Beijing has clung to the politically sensitive growth target of 8 per cent this year, and the headline economic numbers appear increasingly at odds with such important indicators as power consumption and freight cargo,

the falsification of figures has become more than just the perennial gripe of economists and statisticians. Massaging the economic evidence has become the subject of public debate and the cause of deep discomfort at the highest levels of the Chinese leadership.

The con trick at the Anhui grain store has a distressing echo in China. During the Great Leap Forward, Chairman Mao's disastrous scheme in the late 1950s to multiply agricultural and industrial output, local officials vied for the favour of the Chinese leadership by producing ever more incredible reports of record grain harvests, even while tens of millions of people were starving.

The gulf between reality and reports from rural officials is plainly not as wide in 1998. Nevertheless, there are serious concerns that the steadfast commitment of China's political leaders - notably President Jiang Zemin and Mr Zhu - to hit the 8 per cent economic growth target is fostering false reporting.

"If you have a strict, unbending target, then there is a tendency for local government to lie and cheat and please the higher authorities at any cost," says Steve Xu,



Chinese farmers prepare grain for sale in 1997. This year, some of the crop has been less visible

analyst at Standard Chartered in Hong Kong.

This week, Liu Guoguang, one of China's best known economists, said too much emphasis on the growth goal could "prompt local officials to report false successes".

A number of "false successes" have recently come to light. China yesterday announced that it had fined Chengdu Hongguang Industrial, a maker of television components, and punished a number of its officials for supplying false information in order to get a listing on the Shanghai stock exchange last year. The company had falsely claimed a profit for 1996 of RMB64m, rather than an actual loss of RMB103m, and continued reporting profits even while it was losing money after the listing.

In the town of Belpiao in Liaoning, a province in the north of the country, the China Economic Times reported that one municipal official multiplied the output of several local enterprises fivefold "in order to fulfil the task given by a higher-level official".

In a nearby rural area, it has emerged that while the local government body reported the value of last year's beanproduct production at RMB14.3m, the real value was only RMB1.3m - less than 10 per cent of the figure claimed.

The recent frequency of news in the state media about inflated official reporting suggests not only that

government alarm about systematic disinformation is growing, but also that Beijing may well be lowering expectations of growth this year and preparing the ground for a final figure below the 8 per cent target.

Wishful thinking has for years blurred China's statistics. Western economists have become accustomed to knocking 2 percentage points or so off the annual gross domestic product growth figures to account for the systematic over-reporting and double-counting.

But the scepticism has reached a new pitch this year, as many analysts feel local officials have been under extraordinary pressure to inflate the production numbers to ensure

China meets the growth target that Mr Zhu pledged to hit at the beginning of the year.

Local officials, too, suggest they have little choice but to tell a few white lies. In Liaoning, for example, one official observed that government grants and personal perks depended on growth performance. "Those who tell the truth and report the real figures will suffer."

Provincial pride, too, plays a part. Yang Chifeng, responsible for the grain store in Nanjing county that borrowed rice to impress Mr Zhu this year, was quoted as saying: "Nanjing is one of China's big grain-producing prefectures. It would be embarrassing if higher officials found no grain here."

Heavy backing from states for tobacco deal

By Richard Tomkins in New York

The \$206bn US tobacco deal yesterday looked set to enter the record books as the world's biggest civil liability settlement after gathering overwhelming support from the states that had been asked to sign it.

As the noon deadline passed, a handful of states had still to announce whether they had sent their acceptance to Christine Gregoire, the Washington state attorney general who led the negotiations.

But the deal had won the votes of states representing well in excess of 80 per cent of the money to be paid out - the threshold that had to be reached for the deal to take effect.

The settlement provides for the big US tobacco companies to pay the states \$206bn over the next 25 years to settle their claims for the cost of treating sick smokers under the Medicaid public health programme.

The tobacco companies have also agreed to drop nearly all outdoor advertising and to accept curbs on other marketing tools such as sports sponsorship and promotional merchandise.

Because the deal is a private legal settlement between the tobacco companies and the states, it does not require federal government approval - unlike the previous attempt at a deal,

which went wrong in Congress earlier this year.

After all the legal documents have been signed over the next few days, the settlement will take effect immediately.

One remaining obstacle is the vigorous opposition of the public health community, which regards the settlement as a sell-out to the tobacco industry and is fighting to block it. Action on Smoking and Health, an anti-tobacco lobbying group, said the deal still required the approval of the courts in which the state lawsuits were filed because judges had a supervisory authority over any kind of settlement.

"The battle is not over," said John Banzhaf, Ash's executive director. "We have pending in the 10 most populous states a challenge asking judges to hold up the settlement and to order a 30-day review period in which it can be studied, followed by a hearing at which views can be aired."

Public health groups oppose the deal because it does not give the Food and Drug Administration the power to regulate tobacco and does not penalise the industry if teenage smoking fails to decline.

They also fear that the deal will be regarded as a final solution to the tobacco issue, making it less likely that further action will be taken.

United Kingdom Debt Management Office

ISSUE OF £450,000,000

2½% INDEX-LINKED TREASURY STOCK 2013

INTEREST PAYABLE HALF YEARLY ON 16 FEBRUARY AND 16 AUGUST FOR AUCTION ON A UNIFORM PRICE BASIS ON 25 NOVEMBER 1998

NON-COMPETITIVE BIDS PAYABLE IN FULL WITH APPLICATION AT THE RATE OF £190 PER £100 OF STOCK

Application has been made to the London Stock Exchange for the Stock to be admitted to the Official List on 26 November 1998

Auction of Stock

1. THE UNITED KINGDOM DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE ("the DMO") invites bids for the above Stock.

General

2. The prospectus is issued under the arrangements described in the Information Memorandum relating to the issue, offering and redemption of British Government Stock, published by the DMO on 12 May 1998 (the "Information Memorandum"). The terms of the Information Memorandum apply to the above Stock and to the auction described in this prospectus except where expressly varied.

Maturity

3. If not previously redeemed under the provisions of paragraph 10, the Stock will be repayable on 16 August 2013. The value of the principal on repayment will be subject to the terms of this prospectus, to the movement during the life of the Stock of the United Kingdom General Index of Retail Prices maintained by the Office for National Statistics, or any index which may replace that index for the purposes of this prospectus, such movement being indicated by the Index figure issued monthly and subsequently published in the London Gazette.

4. The amount due on repayment, per £100 nominal of Stock, will be £100 multiplied by the Index ratio applicable to the month in which the payment falls due. This amount, expressed in pounds sterling to four places of decimals rounded to the nearest figure below, will be announced by the Bank of England not later than the business day immediately preceding the date of the penultimate interest payment.

Interest

5. For the purposes of this prospectus, the Index figure applicable to any month will be the Index figure issued seven months prior to the relevant month and relating to the month before that prior month, "rounding" means calendar month, and the Index ratio applicable to any month will be equal to the Index figure applicable to that month divided by the Index figure applicable to February 1985.

6. Interest is payable half-yearly on 16 February and 16 August. Each half-yearly interest payment will be made as a rate, per £100 nominal of Stock, of £1.25 multiplied by the Index ratio applicable to the month in which the payment falls due. The rate of interest for each interest payment, which will be announced by the Bank of England not later than the business day immediately preceding the date of the payment, will be expressed as a percentage in pounds sterling to four places of decimals rounded to the nearest figure below.

7. The price payable for this further issue of the Stock will include an amount equal to accrued interest from 16 August 1998 (the last interest payment date of the Stock) to 25 November 1998 (the subscription date of this further issue) at the rate of £1.25 per £100 nominal of Stock. The further issue of the Stock will also pay for the full six month interest due on 16 February 1999 at the rate of £2.2897 per £100 nominal of Stock.

Reductions to the Index

8. If the Index is revised to a new base after the Stock is issued, it will be necessary, for the purposes of the preceding paragraphs, to calculate and use a notional Index figure in substitution for the Index figure applicable to the month in which repayment takes place and/or an interest payment falls due ("the month of payment"). This notional Index figure will be calculated by multiplying the actual Index figure applicable to the month of payment by the Index figure of the old base for the month on which the revised Index is based and dividing the product by the new base figure for the same month. This procedure will be used for each occasion on which a revision is made during the life of the Stock.

9. If the Index is not published for a month for which it is relevant for the purposes of this prospectus, the Bank of England, after appropriate consultation with the relevant Government Department, will publish a substitute Index figure which shall be an estimate of the Index figure which would have been applicable to the month of payment, and which shall be used for all purposes for which the actual

10. If any change should be made to the coverage or the base calculation of the Index, which in the opinion of the DMO would be materially detrimental to the interests of the stockholders, Her Majesty's Treasury will publish a notice in the London Gazette immediately following the announcement by the relevant Government Department of the change, informing stockholders and offering them the right to require Her Majesty's Treasury to redeem their Stock. For the purposes of this paragraph, repayment to the stockholders who exercise this right will be effective, on a date to be chosen by Her Majesty's Treasury, not later than seven months from the last month of publication of the old Index. The amount of principal due on repayment and of any interest which has accrued will be calculated on the basis of the Index ratio applicable to the month in which repayment takes place. A notice setting out the administrative arrangements will be sent to stockholders at their registered address by the Bank of England at the appropriate time.

FOTRA exemptions

11. Under legislation contained in the Finance Act 1998, the exemptions from United Kingdom taxation in favour of non-resident holders described in paragraph 44 of the Information Memorandum apply to this Stock.

Gross payment of interest

12. Interest will be paid without deduction of income tax. However, stockholders on the Bank of England Register may elect to have UK income tax deducted from interest payments on application to the Bank of England.

Methods of application

13. Bids may be made on either a competitive or non-competitive basis as set out below and in accordance with paragraphs 21-29 (except those paragraphs indicated below) of the Information Memorandum.

Competitive bids

14. Competitive bids may only be made by those gilt-edged market makers who have been formally recognised as index-linked gilt-edged market makers ("IG GEMMs") by the DMO. IG GEMMs may make competitive bids either on their own account or on behalf of clients. Competitive bids must be made by telephone to the DMO not later than 10.30 AM ON WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 1998. Each competitive bid must be for one amount and at one price expressed as a multiple of £2.01 of £1 per £100 nominal of Stock. Competitive bids must be for a minimum of and in multiples of £1 million nominal of Stock. Paragraphs 34(i) and (ii) of the Information Memorandum do not apply to competitive bids for this further issue of Stock.

Non-competitive bids - IG GEMMs

15. Each IG GEMM may make one non-competitive bid which must be made by telephone to the DMO not later than 10.30 AM ON WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 1998. The nominal amount of each IG GEMM non-competitive bid will be communicated individually to each IG GEMM by the DMO prior to the auction. If any IG GEMM does not bid for its full non-competitive entitlement, the remainder will be covered with the Stock available for allotment to competitive bids. Paragraphs 35(i) and (ii) of the Information Memorandum do not apply to non-competitive bids from IG GEMMs for this further issue of Stock.

Non-competitive bids - other applicants

16. Other applicants may make non-competitive bids by completing the application form issued with the prospectus. Each non-competitive bid must be for a minimum of £1,000 nominal of Stock and for not more than £250,000 nominal of Stock, and must be for a multiple of £1,000 nominal of Stock. Paragraphs 35(i) and (ii) of the Information Memorandum do not apply to non-competitive bids from non-IG GEMMs for this further issue of Stock. Completed application forms must be sent to the Bank of England, New Issues, PO Box 444, Gloucester, GL1 1NP, who are acting on behalf of the DMO, to arrive not later than 10.30 AM ON WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 1998 or lodged by hand at the DMO, Grosvenor House, 138 Grosvenor, London not later than 10.30 AM ON WEDNESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 1998.

Non-competitive bids: amount payable on application

17. The amount payable on application in the case of a non-competitive bid (except in the case of a non-competitive bid made by an IG GEMM) is £190 per £100 nominal of Stock.

price and Stock will be sold to applicants whose competitive bids are at or above the lowest price in which the DMO decides that any competitive bid should be accepted (the "bidding price"). Applicants whose competitive bids are accepted will purchase Stock at the bidding price (plus accrued interest). Competitive bids which are accepted and which are made at prices above the bidding price will be satisfied in full. Competitive bids which are accepted and which are made at the bidding price may be satisfied in part only. No sale will be made of an amount less than £1,000 nominal of Stock. Non-competitive bids which are accepted will be accepted in full at the non-competitive sale price plus accrued interest. The non-competitive sale price will be equal to the bidding price.

Bids irrevocable

18. Bids will not be revocable between 10.30 am on Wednesday, 25 November 1998 and 10.00 am on Monday, 30 November 1998.

United Kingdom Debt Management Office

LONDON

17 November 1998

Application Form for

2½% INDEX-LINKED TREASURY STOCK 2013

TO THE UNITED KINGDOM DEBT MANAGEMENT OFFICE

(We apply in accordance with the terms of the prospectus dated 17 November 1998, and the Information Memorandum relating to the issue, offering and redemption of British Government Stock dated 12 May 1998 (the "Information Memorandum") as follows:-)

Nominal amount of 2½% Index-linked Treasury Stock 2013 applied for, being a multiple of £1,000, with a minimum of £1,000 and a maximum of £250,000 nominal of Stock:

£

Sum enclosed, being £190 for every £100 nominal of Stock applied for:

£

We request that Stock sold to us be registered in the undermentioned name(s) and that any certificate be sent by post at my/our risk to the first named holder at the address shown below.

We warrant that to my/our knowledge this is the only non-competitive application made for my/our benefit (or for the benefit of the person(s) of whose behalf I am acting).

IN THE CASE OF AN APPLICATION MADE ON BEHALF OF A THIRD PARTY, we have obtained and recorded evidence of the identity of each person on whose behalf I am acting, and we will on demand make such evidence available to the DMO or the relevant supervisory authority.

SIGNATURE(S) of, or on behalf of, applicant

Date

DETAILS OF APPLICANT(S) (if not person(s) in Registration Details)

FORENAME(S) AND SURNAME(S)

ADDRESS (including postcode)

CAPITAL LETTERS PLEASE

REGISTRATION DETAILS

Stock may be registered in the names of individuals or a corporate body.

Title Forename(s) in full Surname

Address

Postcode

Title Forename(s) in full Surname

Address

Postcode

Daytime Telephone Number (in case there is a query)

FOR BANK OF ENGLAND USE

Box No. A467 Ext. Reference

New Account No. Cert. Posted Date

The Stock will be registered on the Bank of England Register, unless you wish the Stock to be registered at the Bank of Ireland, Belfast, in which case please tick the box.

NOTE: For holdings on the Bank of England Register, interest payments on this Stock will be paid without deduction of United Kingdom income tax unless this box is ticked. We request that tax is deducted from interest payments on my/our holding of this Stock.

(a) A separate cheque must accompany each application. Cheques should be made payable to "Bank of England" and crossed "New Issues", and must be drawn on a bank in, and be payable in, the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man. The DMO reserves the right to require evidence of the identity of any applicant for Stock or of any person for whom an applicant is acting as agent. An applicant lodging an application form in person should bring evidence of identity bearing the applicant's photograph (for example a passport) and evidence of the applicant's name and address from a third party, for example a recent bill from a gas, electricity or telephone company or a bank or building society statement.

(b) The procedure for any refund, or further amount payable, is set out in the Information Memorandum.

BRITAIN

ECONOMY EXPECTATIONS RAISED OF FURTHER INTEREST RATE CUT

Growth well below long-term trend

By Christopher Adams, Economics Staff

Economic growth has fallen significantly below its long-term trend rate for the first time in more than two years, despite the continued strength of domestic spending.

The Office for National Statistics yesterday revised down its estimate of third-quarter growth from a seasonally adjusted 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product to 0.4 per cent. The data raised expectations among some

economists that the Bank of England could cut rates again when it meets next month. "The balance of risks to inflation and the economy lies firmly on the downside with UK output now below trend," said Marian Bell at Royal Bank of Scotland.

Overall output growth actually slowed from the previous quarter, when the economy expanded 0.5 per cent. The annual rate of growth comparing July to September with the year earlier was also revised downwards from 2.5 to 2.3 per

cent. Weaker growth than previously estimated in manufacturing and construction was the main reason for the revision. Output from the more robust services sector continued to rise, increasing 0.6 per cent, a slower rate than during last year. Transport, communications and business services provided the backbone of services growth.

The fuller data also showed that a large stock overhang is building. Inventories rose more sharply than many economists were

expecting, by £1.6bn, the seventh consecutive quarterly increase. "This looks perverse given the outlook for demand, suggesting that it was involuntary," said Michael Pickles, economist at Lehman Brothers.

The increase in stockbuilding, shared between manufacturing and services, may also help explain the surprisingly strong 0.9 per cent growth in total domestic demand. The data reinforce the view that an economic slowdown is imminent and could heighten concerns that

the chancellor of the exchequer's predictions for future growth may be overly optimistic.

But Adam Cole, economist at HSBC, said the figures would probably have few implications for monetary policy. The Bank of England had pointed to the possibility of a downward revision. Household spending rose by 0.4 per cent, weaker than the growth in retail sales. Consumer confidence, meanwhile, has recovered slightly.

A survey published today

says recent cuts in interest rates have boosted sentiment. The monthly report, published by GfK, a polling organisation that carries the research on behalf of the European Union, shows consumers are now more optimistic about the economy than they were in October. The composite index used by GfK to express the level of confidence rose from -9 to -7 in November. Some 38 per cent of those surveyed expect it to deteriorate over the next year, compared with 43 per cent last month.

Warner appoints Universal chief as chairman

By Alice Rawsthorn

Warner Music, one of the UK's biggest record companies, has appointed Nick Phillips, managing director of Universal Music (UK), as its new chairman. Mr Phillips will succeed Rob Dickins, a flamboyant figure who has chaired Warner for more than a decade and worked as an executive producer on albums for artists such as Cher, Enya and Rod Stewart.

The Warner reshuffle comes at a turbulent time for the UK music industry. One of the country's strongest export sectors, it now faces tough trading conditions in the sluggish global music market and is dogged by the strong pound.

Other big UK record companies, notably Bertelsmann and EMI, have also appointed senior management this year. Jean-François Coudon, ousted as head of EMI's UK record labels this spring, is understood to have accepted a post as chief executive of the European arm of Sega, the Japanese video games group.

His appointment is expected to be announced next week. The industry is braced for more job losses after Seagram, Universal's Canadian parent, completes its \$1.1bn bid for PolyGram early next month.

Mr Phillips, Warner's recruit, was an early casualty of the bid last month when he quit Universal after Seagram appointed John Kennedy, chairman of PolyGram (UK), as head of its enlarged UK music division.

He will take charge of Warner after a successful year in which it has released hit albums by The Corrs, Simply Red, Madonna and REM.

Warner has also topped the UK singles chart for four weeks with Cher's *Believe*, executive produced by Mr Phillips.

Senior Warner executives met Mr Phillips in Los Angeles yesterday to discuss the possibility of his remaining as a consultant or to launch his own record label.

Warner has also held talks with Roger Ames, PolyGram's head of worldwide music, regarding a senior executive role and a distribution deal for London Records, his label.

Mr Ames has also been courted by Bertelsmann and Universal.

ROYAL OPERA THE FORMER HEAD OF NEW YORK'S AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE HAS TAKEN CHARGE IN LONDON

US 'can do' man takes centre stage

By Antony Thornton

When Michael Kaiser ran the American Ballet Theatre in New York its finances were so bad he had to switch off every second light bulb and was unable to order copying paper.

The new Royal Opera chief executive, brimming with north American "can do" confidence, believes the situation at the beleaguered institution is nowhere near as dire. It is, he insisted yesterday, "dramatic in terms of public perception rather than cash".

Mr Kaiser, 44, said the new opera house, due to open next December after a £24m (\$359m) overhaul, was on time and on budget. It should open its doors on December 1 1999.

Mr Kaiser, the fourth person to take up the post at the cash-strapped Opera House in two years, is hopeful negotiations with the dancers, the orchestra, the technicians and the opera chorus over new contracts will soon be concluded.

Once a deal is agreed the government should provide enough money to enable it to put into practice its new policy of lower ticket prices and wider access. He expects to reduce seat prices for many performances, particularly matinees and at weekends.

Mr Kaiser threatened to



Michael Kaiser: Royal Opera House situation is 'dramatic in terms of public perception rather than cash'

Reuters

If the government will not provide extra cash on top of the annual subsidy of £15m, Mr Kaiser, who arrives with a fearsome reputation as a fundraiser, expects to raise the money from the corporate sector, trusts and individuals.

He also seems to have persuaded Bernard Haitink to stay on as music director. Mr Haitink threatened to

leave because there was little work planned for the orchestra in 1999. Now Mr Kaiser hopes to schedule some concerts and semi-staged opera performances.

He also expects to schedule a full programme by the Royal Opera and Royal Ballet by 2002.

But Mr Kaiser still faces

obstacles. The board cannot appoint an artistic director

until negotiations with unions over working practices, and with the government over a larger grant, are finalised.

He admitted some Royal Ballet dancers, upset at contracts that increase work load while freezing pay, might quit. In addition, the accumulating deficit is still rising to a planned peak of £20m by March 2000.

Mr Kaiser is doing his best to identify with the artists - he has taken singing and dancing lessons - and to stress artistic quality as much as financial prudence.

He has no contract at Covent Garden. If things deteriorate further he can walk away knowing that he did not cause the crisis. And he has never been sacked in his life.

CAR INDUSTRY GERMAN GROUP 'OPTIMISTIC'

Talks set to meet BMW investment deadline

By Juliette Jowit in Birmingham

Union negotiations with Rover, owned by BMW of Germany, over working practices at the Longbridge car plant in the English Midlands are expected to end next week in time for the parent to agree investment up to £1.6bn (\$2.6bn).

BMW has said the investment to build the new Mini or a medium-sized replacement for the 200 and 400 series depends on workers agreeing to more flexible hours and no overtime.

But the German group declined to comment on whether the investment would be delayed if unions and management failed to reach an agreement by the deadline at the end of November.

BMW said it was "positive and optimistic" the negotiations will end with a good situation for both sides.

The Transport and General Workers Union said talks of imminent settlement was "premature" but rejected the possibility of not reaching agreement by a week on Monday.

"That scenario doesn't enter our heads," said Tony Woodley, the chief negotiator. "It's our intention to reach an understanding by the end of November. We'll do it one way or another."

Union negotiators are believed to have agreed to a change to four nine-hour shifts a week, in place of five eight-hour shifts, and workers being paid for a full week even when shifts are cut back in return for working the extra time when needed for no extra pay.

Sources close to the talks claimed they had stalled on a proposal to abolish the 50 per cent wage premium for Saturday shifts, and some smaller outstanding items.

Mr Woodley said the talks were making "steady progress" but several areas of disagreement remained. "There's no one single sticking point," he said.

Any agreement will have to be put to the vote with Rover's 40,000 workers in the UK and be approved by the BMW board. The extent of the investment of up to £1.6bn in Longbridge, which employs 14,000 workers, will depend on how far the unions go to meeting the company's demands.

Mr Woodley said confirmation of £1.6bn investment for five new models at the Land Rover plant at Solihull, which employs 11,000, is also part of the deal.

"Contrary to everyone's belief everything's safe at Solihull, there's a company in America that's just started making not only sport cars but the first 4x4 which BMW has manufactured under its own name. It's a car, but I'm not taking anything for granted," he added.

A "close relative" of Sir Graham Kirkham, executive chairman of DFS and former Tory treasurer, provided a £500,000 interest-free loan. A group run by Lord Harris of Peckham, the carpets entrepreneur and another former Conservative treasurer, also gave a £500,000 loan.

Euroceptics are key Tory donors. Ian McCartney, the Labour trade and industry minister, said the Conservatives had "become dependent on the cash of a few Eurosceptic millionaires".

William Hague, Tory leader, banned foreign donations to the party when he replaced John Major in July last year.

Mr Hague also agreed the party would, for the first time, publish a list of individuals and companies who had given more than £5,000. However, the list does not cover the period from March to July of last year.

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MAN IN THE NEWS BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

Reluctant peacemaker

Judy Dempsey explains why doubts persist over the Israeli prime minister's commitment to peace with the Palestinians

W as it the crossing of the Rubicon (or perhaps the Jordan)? On Thursday, Benjamin Netanyahu finally persuaded a divided and unruly cabinet to hand over a small parcel of land to the Palestinians on Thursday. It was the first time the Israeli prime minister has transferred any land that he had been responsible for negotiating over from start to finish.

This, and the Wye Accords signed with the Palestinians last month, have suggested to some that the man widely criticised for throttling the Middle East peace process is supporting the principle of trading land for peace and was even acting upon that principle.

Yet the reaction was muted. There was qualified praise from the Israeli media; some rejoicing from the Palestinians; some relief from US diplomats. That was as far as it went.

But why did the significance of a right-wing Likud party leader handing over land to the Palestinians carry so little enthusiasm? Why was it not accompanied by the soul-searching that occurred after the late Yitzhak Rabin reluctantly shook Mr Arafat's hand in September 1993?

Perhaps it is because Mr Netanyahu has approached the peace process with

so little conviction. The jury is still out, said a member of the moderate Third Way, one of Mr Netanyahu's coalition partners. "We just don't know if he wants to go the whole way with the peace process."

Take, for example, his recent performance when interviewed on Israel's Channel Two television.

Why, the interviewer asked Mr Netanyahu, did he keep insisting that Yasser Arafat convene the Palestinian National Council to vote again on articles in the Palestine Charter calling for Israel's destruction, which had already been amended in April 1996.

Mr Netanyahu replied that this was part of the Wye accord signed last month in Washington.

The interviewer challenged him, reading out the relevant section of the accord which stated that "invited members" of the PNC "affirm" the amendments.

Mr Netanyahu, who kept twisting the words, then

grabbed the Wye agreement. Suddenly, he said he had to get his reading glasses. Some viewers were puzzled. They had never seen Mr Netanyahu wearing glasses, or for that matter looking so flustered. There was a commercial break.

For many viewers, the interview was indicative of the confusion of the prime minister as seen over his commitment to the peace accord.

"Ideologically and emotionally, Netanyahu has still not accepted the Palestinians as a people with a right to have their own state," says a senior western diplomat. "I am pleased this small step has been taken. But it is too early to judge him."

Mr Netanyahu may well be disappointed with such views, but he has only himself to blame. Since his return from the marathon summit at the Wye Plantation, his words and deeds have contributed to the sense of caution and confusion.

Mr Netanyahu's advisers admit that, on his return

from Wye, the prime minister could have capitalised on the good will and support among Likud moderates and Israelis who believe in a peace process that includes an exchange of land for peace, and eventually a Palestinian state. After all, he was also the first Likud leader who drew up a peace accord with Mr Arafat.

But instead, Mr Netanyahu squandered his peace-making efforts by reinterpreting the Wye accord, much to the dismay of the US. The Palestinian Charter was just one example. He also urged Mr Arafat not to declare an independent Palestinian state next May. To add insult to injury, 150 of the 250 Palestinian prisoners released yesterday were common criminals.

"You would think Wye had never taken place," said Hassan Ashour, one of the Palestinian negotiators in Maryland.

Palestinian officials say they were prepared to tolerate some of Mr Netanyahu's harsh rhetoric - if that is

the price of placating his rightwing critics in return for receiving land. Indeed, Mr Netanyahu's advisers warned them to expect as much.

But what they could not have foreseen was how Mr Netanyahu disregarded parts of the accord which he had agreed to, but which no longer suited him.

One of those articles states that the status of the West Bank or Gaza should not be changed. Yet Mr Netanyahu issued tenders for constructing the controversial Jewish settlement of Har Homa, in Arab east Jerusalem.

He then gave the green light for expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank while refusing to rebuke Ariel Sharon, his foreign minister, for calling on settlers to "grab land on the hills". No wonder, say sceptics, that his decision to hand in the first phase 510 square kilometres over to Palestinians has been viewed with caution.

"Every decision, every statement, every gesture by

Netanyahu was ungracious in its tone and intent from the day he returned from Wye," said a US diplomat. "It did not have to be like this. Netanyahu knows he has broad support to push the entire accord through."

The way in which the first of the three land handovers was carried out may bode ill for the future, especially if, as one of Mr Netanyahu's close advisers said, yesterday's handover was aimed at "appeasing the international community".

Others close to the peace talks said the price in any case was not that great. "Netanyahu will try to control as much of the West Bank as possible through strengthening the settlements," he argued. "It's what he believes in: security and holding on to as much as *Eretz Israel* (the biblical homeland of the Jews) as possible."

The coming weeks will be no less turbulent and confusing. The cabinet, which failed to give him majority support for the first handover, is unlikely to do so in the future. And as Israeli negotiators argue, Mr Netanyahu still seems reluctant to put his full weight behind a peace process anchored on partnership and the acceptance of a viable Palestinian state. Until he does that, said one of his coalition partners, "he will not have crossed the Rubicon."



A byte of the market

Paul Taylor and Christopher Price explain why consumers in France and Britain pay so much more for computers than those in the US and Germany

L ike gravity's effect on Newton's apple, the one rule about personal computer prices is that they always fall. As costs are squeezed out from component prices, the big manufacturers have slashed prices to sell more computers to more people.

A few years ago, a big-name home personal computer cost \$2,500; now it can be bought in all out-of-town shopping malls anywhere in America for \$700 or less.

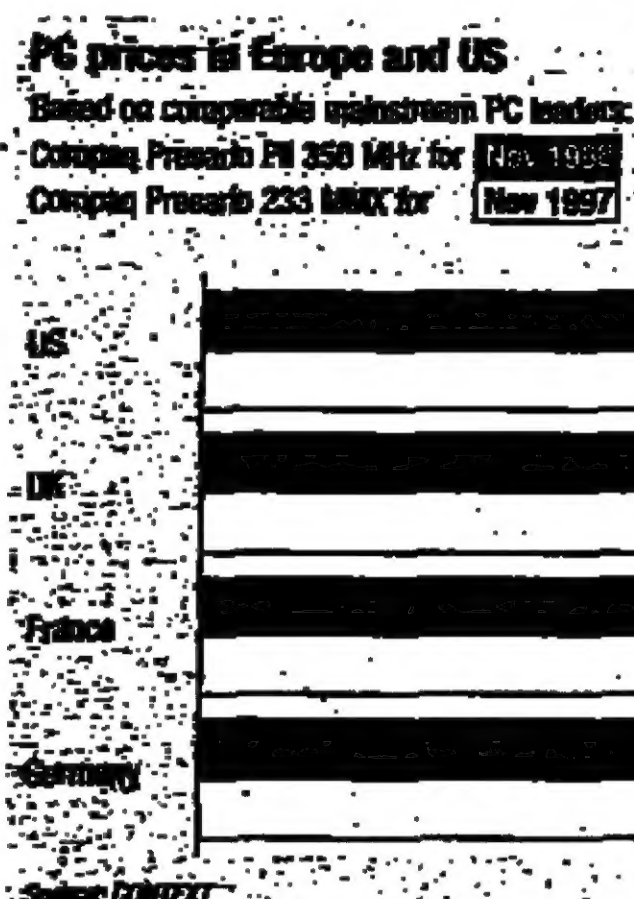
But some countries - particularly Britain - seem to defy gravity. There, the decline in the average price of home PCs has been unspectacular. This has puzzled component suppliers and manufacturers from Compaq, the world's largest computer maker, to Intel, by far the world's biggest chip maker, to complain that high street retailers have been stifling the UK market.

Last week Craig Barrett, Intel's chief executive, joined the fray. Speaking at a trade fair in Las Vegas, Mr Barrett said: "Dixons [a leading UK retailer] charges ridiculous margins."

Although the charge was rejected by John Clars, Dixons' chief executive, it has nevertheless focused attention on the issue of PC pricing anomalies in different countries. After all, prices in France are as high as those in Britain.

The discrepancies are curious. After all, PCs are an international product, roughly the same everywhere, and not subject to big tax variations. So why do PC prices vary so much from country to country?

The US is the world's cheapest market for home PCs and that is partly because it is the world's biggest. It has lots of big competing manufacturers, such as Compaq, Dell Computer, Hewlett Packard and IBM.



And its retailers have the largest economies of scale.

The US is also the most sophisticated, and has been at the forefront of direct sales marketing, which has been a key factor in the downward pressure on retail prices. And because direct marketers such as Dell Computer sell so many computers, they have also been able to squeeze the margins of their component suppliers.

This matters because components account for such a large share of the price of a PC. Chip prices account for more than one-third of the cost (and have slumped 50 per cent in the past year in the US).

Germany, which is as cheap as the US, also reaps economies of scale. It is Europe's biggest market for desktop machines and is considered by PC manufacturers to be the most competitive. It is dominated by local PC assemblers rather than big multinationals.

"German PC buyers are focused on price," says one analyst. In the home (personal) market, average spending was around DM2,453 (\$1,850) or 24 per cent less than in the same period last year. Total spending on PCs was around

DM3,740m in the third quarter, when around 1.2m PCs were sold, including 336,000 for personal use.

Most home PCs used to be sold through the big high-street dealers. The pressure on prices has come from the growth of direct marketing, and perhaps more significantly, from supermarkets, which according to Siemens, one of Germany's leading PC makers, now account for the majority of PC sales. Aldi, one of the big supermarket chains, has sent shudders through the manufacturing industry by offering cut-price clones for as little as DM1,998.

In contrast, the two dearer markets have a single dominant retailer and distinct consumer preferences. In Britain, prices are on average more than 50 per cent higher than in Germany, according to Contax, a marketing research group. And although it may look like the UK consumer is getting a raw deal, analysts and price street retailers say the price differential reflects different buying practices between the two countries.

Consumers in Britain, they argue, tend to buy more powerful machines, with more bells and whistles,

than their German counterparts. The British market research shows, are also less knowledgeable than PC buyers on the continent, which may explain why they can be persuaded to buy more expensive machines.

Several other differences emerge between the UK and Germany. In the UK the direct market - led by companies such as Dell, Gateway and a raft of local rivals - account for about 41 per cent of PC sales, a much higher proportion than elsewhere in Europe. But whereas the direct market in the US has tended to supply the cheap end of the market, in the UK it has catered to the purchaser of more expensive equipment. And in the high street, Dixons dominates: estimates for its share of the market range from 15 per cent to 50 per cent.

The French market bears some similarities to the UK, with both average brand prices and sales volumes much the same. Like the UK, France has a dominant electrical retailer, FNAC, though it too is facing competition from supermarkets and direct suppliers. The Carrefour hypermarket chain, for example, recently introduced a Pentium PC priced at under FF4,000 (\$716).

Eric Maurice, Dell's vice-president for southern Europe, believes PC prices will continue to fall, even in France and the UK. "The introduction of the euro will allow consumers to compare PC prices more easily, and perhaps lead to an eventual convergence in prices across Europe."

Underpinning this trend, is the growth of e-commerce. Computers and computer equipment are already the most popular items to be bought over the internet. That should bring relief even to hard-pressed French and British computer buffs.

Doom-mongers huddle over island under threat

Jersey fears that it might have sold its soul to the devil. Brian Groom reports

T here are two views of Jersey. The first says it is a well-run, well-regulated offshore finance centre. The second says it is a sleazy tax haven that has sold its soul to tax dodgers, money launderers and the devils of international finance.

The recommendations in this week's report by Andrew Edwards, a former civil servant commissioned by the UK Home Office to inquire into Britain's crown dependencies, seem to confirm the former. But as global authorities seek to crack down on what they call harmful tax competition, the 10,000 Jersey finance jobs - a fifth of the workforce - and the prosperity built on them could suffer.

Small island, big fuss. Nine miles long and five miles wide, with a population of 55,000, this territory off the French coast is famous for cows, milk, potatoes, holidays and a 20 per cent flat rate of income tax - is gripped by a vivid, even farcical debate about its future. There have been flights into exile, claims of intimidation, libel actions, allegations that something is rotten in the body politic.

It is not the celebrity resident millionaires who are the problem. "These days they are vetted as much for the contribution they will make to the community as for the tax revenues they bring. For golfer Ian Woosnam, who every Tuesday plays a round with local tax drivers, this 'Caribbean island in the English Channel' is where he and his family can relax in security. Fellow celebrity residents include racing drivers Derek Warwick and Nigel Mansell, boxer Nigel Benn, and Jack Walker, owner of Blackburn

Rovers in the English football Premiership.

Rather, the problem lies with non-resident millionaires who are part of the world's financial business. Jersey's doom-mongers - small in number but loud - insist the island's £230m finance industry is crowding out other parts of the economy, dividing rich from poor, and becoming so powerful that politicians dance to its tune. Built on secretive trusts or companies owned by non-residents who pay little or no tax, it is a cuckoo in Jersey's little nest, they say.

The island's leaders deny the claims. "Everybody in Jersey in one form or another benefits from the revenues raised through finance. There is no question that a combination of tourism, agriculture or other industries would be able to supply the island's excellent services and general infrastructure," says Frank Walker, the island's "chancellor", or president of the States of Jersey's finance and economics committee.

The most prominent dissident is John Christensen, who, after 11 years as assistant economic adviser to the States, the island's government, recently moved to the UK, declaring he had gone into "personal exile from the island I love" to voice his criticisms. Jersey, he argues, is so dependent on international finance that it is vulnerable to sudden capital flight. According to official estimates, finance accounts for 55 per cent of gross domestic product, tourism 24 per cent, and agriculture 4 per cent. Critics say in reality finance's share is even larger. Mr Christensen says it is unhealthy for the island to be so "overdependent" on

a single volatile industry.

There is also trouble among the island's politicians. Senator Stuart Syvret is at loggerheads with an establishment he calls "politically illiterate". Two years ago the States assembly suspended him for six months after he alleged a senior member had a conflict of interest over a proposed limited liability partnerships law, introduced after campaigning by Price Waterhouse and Ernst & Young.

The dissidents appear not to command majority support. Many citizens enjoy the fruits of prosperity: unemployment is below 1 per cent and GDP per head is 25 per cent above mainland levels. All the same, there is an undercurrent of unease.

Jersey can seem a strange and close-knit place. Frank Walker, for instance, is chairman of a family company that owns the island's daily newspaper, as well as being the equivalent of finance minister. That is akin to Gordon Brown or Oskar Lafontaine owning all their country's national newspapers, but few on Jersey see it as odd.

Internally self-governing, the island has its own elected legislative assembly and legal system. It has no political parties, which leads critics to allege it is governed by a conservative oligarchy. It lacks the separation of powers between judiciary, legislature and executive that larger states have - the bailiff, for instance, presides over the States and the Royal Court. Critics say the intertwining of the three parts of the state leads to conflicts of interest.

It is not just young rebels who warn of doom. Richard Falle, a senior advocate and pillar of Jersey's cultural

societies, fears the finance industry could die within 10 years because of two factors: pressure from, among others, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to close down tax havens; and the self-inflicted wound of Jersey's effort to control its population growth by encouraging finance companies to move back-office work elsewhere. He says they might take their front-office work away, too, frustrated by restrictions on recruitment.

Jersey takes the OECD threat seriously. It is lobbying to be removed from a draft list of tax havens that the body is drawing up for possible future targeting. Jersey says it should be listed only if Luxembourg and Switzerland are, too. Critics say Jersey's vehicles for non-resident companies - exempt companies, which pay a 550 fee instead of tax, and international business companies, which typically pay up to 2 per cent - make it a classic tax haven. Jersey says these should be tackled only if similar vehicles in the Netherlands, Belgium and elsewhere are, too.

"I suppose it could all go pear-shaped. If the music stopped, I'd be back in the City getting up at 6.15am every day," says Chris Chambers, director of AIS Govett Management (Jersey), who returned to his native island for a better quality of life.

The music has certainly not stopped yet. "We have never been busier," says Peter Beamish, partner at Deloitte & Touche. But even if the finance sector's growth has a long way to run, so does the argument over Jersey's future.

Additional research by Philip Jeune

Peer pressure

Britain's House of Lords won't go down without a fight, says George Parker

On Tuesday the Queen will preside over the State Opening of Parliament. There she will meet a man wearing a wig and tights, who will attempt to walk backwards down some stairs without falling over. Rouse Dragon Pursuivant and Maitre d'Hotel Extraordinary will be in attendance.

The House of Lords, Britain's upper house of parliament, has always been a bit of a joke. It is the only legislative assembly in any democratic country in the world in which most members sit by virtue of birth, not election.

The Lords contains 635 hereditary peers, compared with 565 life peers appointed by governments (plus 26 bishops and archbishops). As with all the best jokes, there has long been a grain of truth in the Lords' activity. Now this addition to the political merriment of nations and bastion of hereditary peerdom is being brought to a sober end by the professionals of the House of Commons.

Tony Blair's government intends to strip the hereditary peers of their ancient right to sit and vote in the upper house. This time next year, if everything goes according to plan, the

hereditary peers will be forced to watch the State Opening of Parliament on television.

Nearly everyone - including most of the peers themselves - would agree with Mr Blair's assertion that it is "an affront to democracy" that hereditary peers, who pass their titles from generation to generation, should continue to have a vote in parliament.

Lloyd George, the great Liberal leader, called the hereditary peers "500 men, ordinary men, chosen accidentally from among the unemployed". In the 19th century, Walter Bagehot said that the cure for admiring the Lords was to go and look at them.

It hardly makes it less of a democratic affront that most hereditary peers never turn up to vote, nor that the power of the Lords is severely restricted. The house has no say over financial legislation. By and large it can only delay non-financial bills (there is an exception: any bill to lengthen the life of parliament requires the

Lords' approval). The fact that most hereditary peers are Conservatives is, of course, purely coincidental.

This week, the Lords have shown what they can do with their power to revise legislation, and to send back laws to the Commons if they do not like them. Five times they refused to pass a government bill on changing the voting system for elections to the European parliament, on the grounds that the proposed change would mean voters could not vote for individual candidates, only for parties. The changes stand a chance of going through anyway before the 1999 poll, but it is clear that the Lords are going down fighting.

Spontaneous fighting resistance is Lord Cranborne, the Tory leader in the Lords. He intends to muster his geriatric army of Tory peers, to delay and frustrate the government. The whiff of mothballs, Brylcreem and freshly-shined shoes will fill the air.

For Lord Cranborne, the battle is his family's destiny.

For he is a scion of the Cecil dynasty, among the most influential names in British politics in the past 600 years. When Elizabeth I was on the throne, a Cecil was by her side; another one, the Marquess of Salisbury, was in Number 10 while Queen Victoria reigned.

At a time when the Commons is increasingly seen to be filled by identikit Blairite "clones", some are getting nostalgic about the colour brought to Westminster by hereditary peers such as the stately Lord Cranborne, before they have even been excluded.

For a start, many are wealthy landowners, who can speak their mind freely without having to worry about political patronage. Some have great experience, whether in farming, the armed forces or business, which they bring to debates in the upper house.

But best of all, many of them are fantastically eccentric. Take, for instance, the rotund Earl of Carlisle, who can be seen regularly in the sports and social staff bar at Westminster, taking

snuff and brushing up on his Estonian grammar. Or the Earl of Gresham, whose magnificent family motto is: "Who can we blame?"

Harold Brookes-Baker, publishing director of the upper-crust handbook Burke's Peerage, claims that Mr Blair risks throwing away a valuable resource by packing the ermine brigade back to their country estates. He says the independent-minded nature of the hereditary peers, and the political acumen passed down through the ages, are vital in a revising chamber.

"The House of Lords is looked up to by other upper houses around the world," he claims. "I can't understand why any intelligent person would want to smash it."

Mr Blair says he does not want to smash the Lords, just reform it, starting with the simple plan to abolish the voting rights of the hereditary peers. The only problem is that the prime minister does not yet know what he wants to replace them with. To that end he is setting up a Royal

Commission to recommend what shape the second chamber should take. It is likely to include an elected element, along with some nominated peers chosen for their expertise, or (many fear) their ability to suck up to their party leader.

For his part, William Hague, the Conservative leader, is not keen to "die in a ditch" to defend the voting rights of the likes of the 28th Baron De Ros. But he agrees with Lord Cranborne that the current system works reasonably well and that the voting rights of the hereditary peers should be abolished only as part of a widespread reform of the Lords, not in advance of them.

Mr Hague argues that once the hereditary peers are ejected, the Lords will become "a giant quango", packed with people appointed on the whim of Tony Blair. Or, in Mr Hague's words, the aristocrats will be replaced by "Tony's cronies".

However, Tony Blair calculates that most Britons would rather see members of the upper house chosen today by their elected leaders than on the basis of birth, and the random sexual exploits of a 17th-century monarch.



Oil price falls on pessimism over Opec

WEEK IN THE MARKETS

By Paul Solman

World oil prices fell to new lows in London this week, with some analysts predicting the market would not recover next year.

Analysts had previously suggested that the unusually cold winter forecast for the northern hemisphere would boost energy consumption and crude prices.

The benchmark January contract for Brent blend oil on the International Petroleum Exchange fell to \$11.18 a barrel at one point, 15 cents below its previous low recorded 10 years ago.

Late yesterday, the contract was trading at \$11.51 against Thursday's close of \$11.49, around \$1 lower than at the end of last week.

Traders have begun to focus on the next meeting of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, to be held in Vienna next week. However, there is little expectation that it will bring any agreement of further cuts in production.

Copper prices dipped on the London Metal Exchange, the three-month metal coming close to the 11½-year low of \$1.570 a tonne it reached last week.

By the close yesterday it had recovered to \$1.615, a gain of \$0.045 on the week.

Palladium prices rose almost 4 per cent after Johnson Matthey predicted supply would fall short of production by 1m ounces this year.

Yesterday, the price was \$300.50 an ounce in late London trading.

The most actively traded November contract, which is nearing expiry, closed at \$2.015 a tonne, down \$0.06 on the day and \$21 down on the week.

The December contract closed yesterday at \$264 a tonne, \$9 down on the day and \$21 down on the week.

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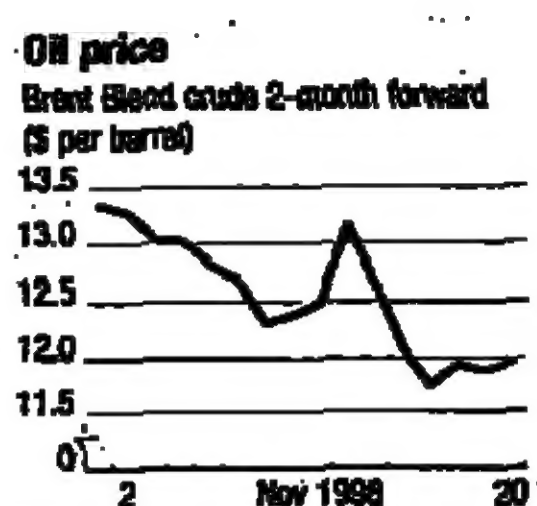
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Oil price (Brent Blend crude 2-month forward) (\$ per barrel)

Source: CommodityWeek

LME warehouse stocks

Aluminium 52,700 +1,700

Copper 24,400 +1,200

Lead 20,700 +1,200

Nickel 10,500 +1,200

Zinc 20,700 +1,200

Th 7,200 +1,200

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BASE METALS

LONDON METAL EXCHANGE

(Prices from International Metal Trading)

IN ALUMINIUM, 30% ZINC (5 per tonne)

Dec 1295-7 1303-0

Nov 1295-7 1303-0

Oct 1295-7 1303-0

Sept 1295-7 1303-0

Aug 1295-7 1303-0

July 1295-7 1303-0

June 1295-7 1303-0

May 1295-7 1303-0

April 1295-7 1303-0

March 1295-7 1303-0

Feb 1295-7 1303-0

Jan 1295-7 1303-0

Dec 1295-7 1303-0

Nov 1295-7 1303-0

Oct 1295-7 1303-0

Sept 1295-7 1303-0

Aug 1295-7 1303-0

July 1295-7 1303-0

June 1295-7 1303-0

May 1295-7 1303-0

April 1295-7 1303-0

March 1295-7 1303-0

Feb 1295-7 1303-0

Jan 1295-7 1303-0

Dec 1295-7 1303-0

Nov 1295-7 1303-0

Oct 1295-7 1303-0

Sept 1295-7 1303-0

Aug 1295-7 1303-0

July 1295-7 1303-0

June 1295-7 1303-0

May 1295-7 1303-0

April 1295-7 1303-0

March 1295-7 1303-0

Feb 1295-7 1303-0

Jan 1295-7 1303-0

Dec 1295-7 1303-0

Nov 1295-7 1303-0

Oct 1295-7 1303-0

Sept 1295-7 1303-0

Aug 1295-7 1303-0

July 1295-7 1303-0

June 1295-7 1303-0

May 1295-7 1303-0

April 1295-7 1303-0

March 1295-7 1303-0

Feb 1295-7 1303-0

Jan 1295-7 1303-0

Dec 1295-7 1303-0

Nov 1295-7 1303-0

Oct 1295-7 1303-0

Sept 1295-7 1303-0

Aug 1295-7 1303-0

July 1295-7 1303-0

June 1295-7 1303-0

May 1295-7 1303-0

April 1295-7 1303-0

March 1295-7 1303-0

Feb 1295-7 1303-0

Jan 1295-7 1303-0

Dec 1295-7 1303-0

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Oct 1295-7 1303-0

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Oct 1295-7 1303-0

Sept 1295-7 1303-0

Aug 1295-7 1303-0

July 1295-7 1303-0

June 1295-7 1303-0

May 1295-7 1303-0

April 1295-7 1303-

CURRENCIES & MONEY

Dollar see-saws

By Alan Beattie

Mixed news from Japan made the dollar see-saw against the yen yesterday, with volatility between the two increased by the usual thin Friday trading.

On the plus side for the dollar was a blow to hopes for a cut in the Japanese consumption tax, which for some has become a totem of the authorities' willingness to embrace radical reform.

But longer-term prospects for the dollar were brought into question by the increasingly aggressive tone being employed by the US administration during the President's trip to Japan.

The Clinton camp has made clear that the US cannot continue indefinitely to prop up Japan and other Asian economies by running perpetual current account deficits and hence acting as the world's consumer of last resort. Some may see this as

tantamount to an admission that the dollar must weaken in the medium term.

After fluctuating between ¥121 and ¥119 in Asian trading, the dollar settled down in Europe to finish London trading hours at ¥120.3, up from Thursday's close of ¥118.8.

Mr Clinton warned yesterday that the fiscal and banking reform plans proposed by the Japanese government may not be sufficient. This threatened recovery both in

POUND SPOT FORWARD AGAINST THE POUND

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

Party was "impossible" and that there were no plans to cut the consumption tax.

Sterling slipped back slightly on the day after the second estimate of UK gross domestic product (GDP) showed quarterly growth revised down and a hefty rise in inventories.

The lower growth rate and the large increases in stocks suggested that a sharp economic slowdown was distinctly possible.

After low retail price and retail sales data suggesting that shops had tried but failed to shift goods by cutting prices, higher inventories may confirm market beliefs that the lower growth predicted by gloomy surveys will materialise towards the end of this year and in 1999.

Sterling closed in London at \$1.657 yesterday, down from \$1.668 on Thursday.

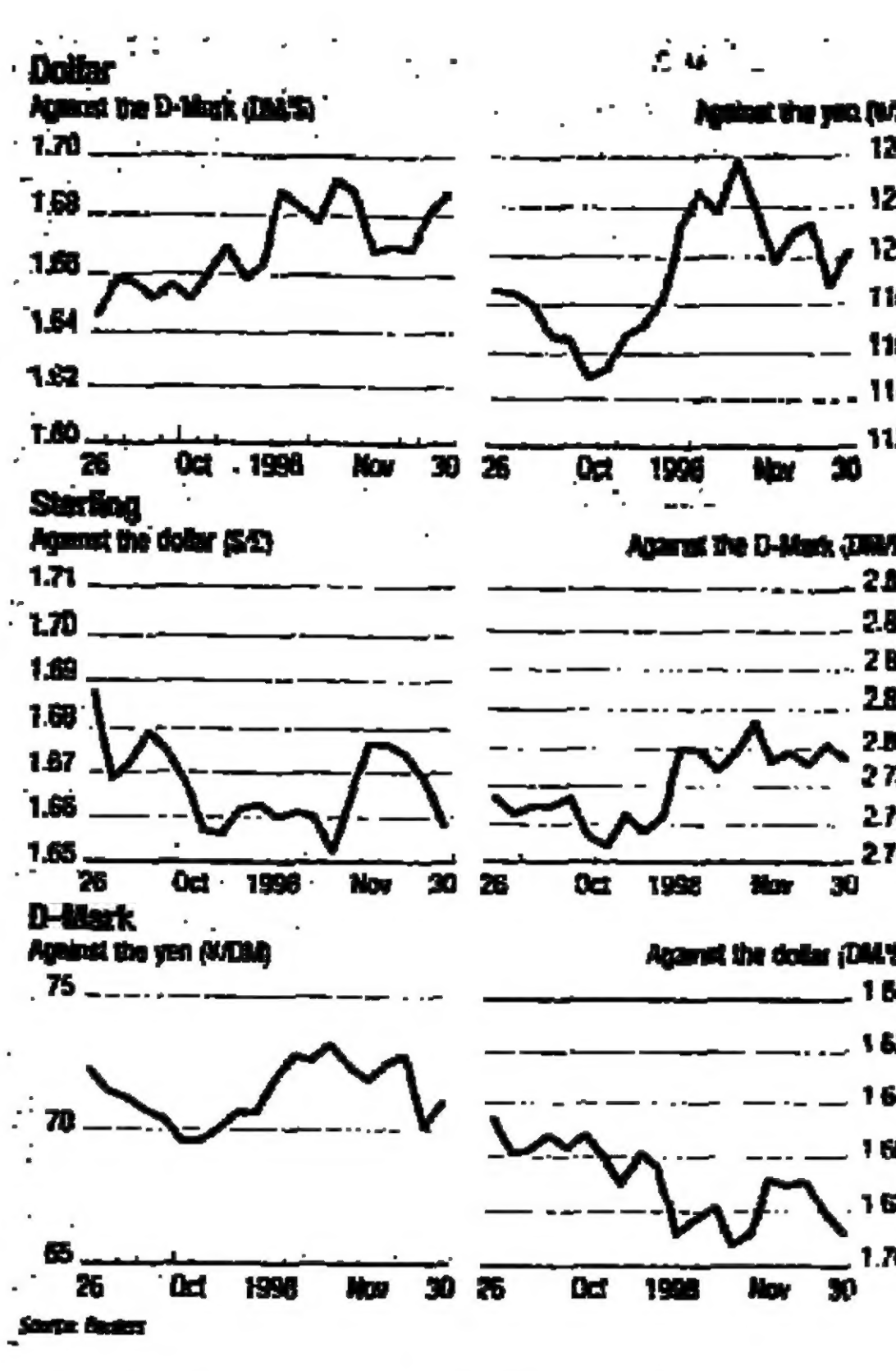
The devil finds work for this market, and short sterling traders chose a quiet day yesterday to get into a rather about some of the possible diabolical consequences

of the millennium bug. Short sterling contracts across the strip fell only a few basis points yesterday in uneventful trading, with the notable exception of the December 1999 contract which settled 15 basis points down at 94.130.

This left the curve of expected future short-term interest rates with a marked upwards tilt of around 10-15 basis points, at the end of next year.

"This phenomenon has been evident in the German futures strip for some time," said Philip Shaw, chief economist at the investment banking group Investec in London, "and now it seems that the UK market has got itself worried about the same thing."

"Market participants are concerned that trading will be difficult, and some trades may fall, in early 2000 because of possible settlement problems arising from the Y2K [Year 2000] issue," said Mr Shaw. "And these fears of a lack of liquidity in 2000 are putting a premium on three-month money at the end of 1999."



WORLD INTEREST RATES

MONEY RATES

Nov 20	Over night	One month	Three months	Six months	One year	Two year	Three year
Belgium	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
France	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Germany	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Italy	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Netherlands	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Sweden	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
UK	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

EURO CURRENCY INTEREST RATES

Nov 20	Over night	One month	Three months	Six months	One year	Two year	Three year
Belgium	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
France	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Germany	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Italy	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Netherlands	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Sweden	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
UK	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

POUND SPOT FORWARD AGAINST THE POUND

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

DOLLAR SPOT FORWARD AGAINST THE DOLLAR

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

DOLLAR SPOT FORWARD AGAINST THE DOLLAR

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

CROSS RATES AND DERIVATIVES

EXCHANGE CROSS RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

EMS EUROPEAN CURRENCY UNIT RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

UK INTEREST RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

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Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
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BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
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Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

UK INTEREST RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

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Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

UK INTEREST RATES

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Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

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UK INTEREST RATES

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Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
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Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 22	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

BASE LENDING RATES

Nov 20	Open	High	Low	Close	Change
Nov 20	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000
Nov 21	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	1.6220	0.0000

UNIT TRUSTS

WINNERS AND LOSERS

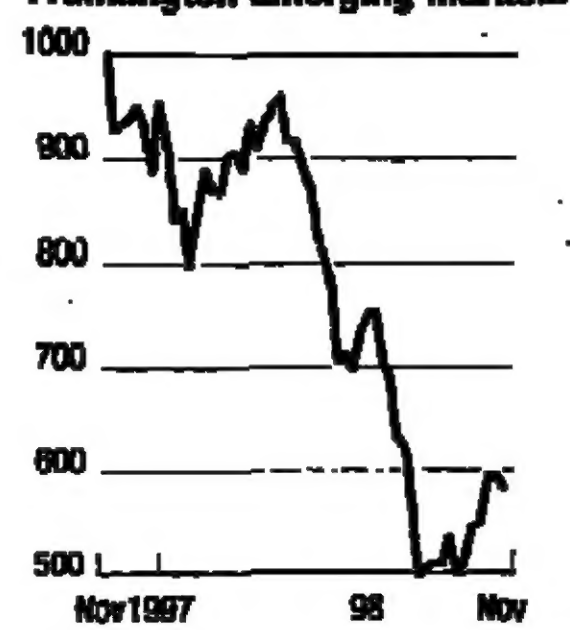
TOP FIVE OVER 1 YEAR:

Baring German Growth	1,534
Newton European	1,415
Fidelity American	1,394
CF Odey European Acc	1,390
Murray European	1,380

BOTTOM FIVE OVER 1 YEAR:

Dimensional UK Smaller Cos	332
Scott Widows Labor America	574
AIR GOWELL American Strategy	577
Oriental RCM GI Emer Mkts	582
Franklington Emerging Markets	584

Franklington Emerging Markets



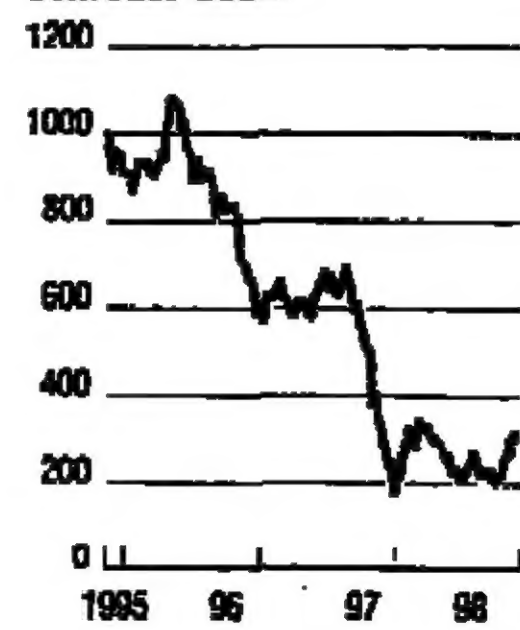
TOP FIVE OVER 3 YEARS:

Jupiter UK Growth Exempt	2,130
Newton European	2,086
Newton European	2,055
Invesco European Growth	2,022
Invesco European Small Cos	1,996

BOTTOM FIVE OVER 3 YEARS:

Old Mutual Thailand Acc	272
Save & Prosper Korea	301
Schroder Seoul	316
Save & Prosper Gold & Expt'n	357
Baring Korea	366

Schroder Seoul



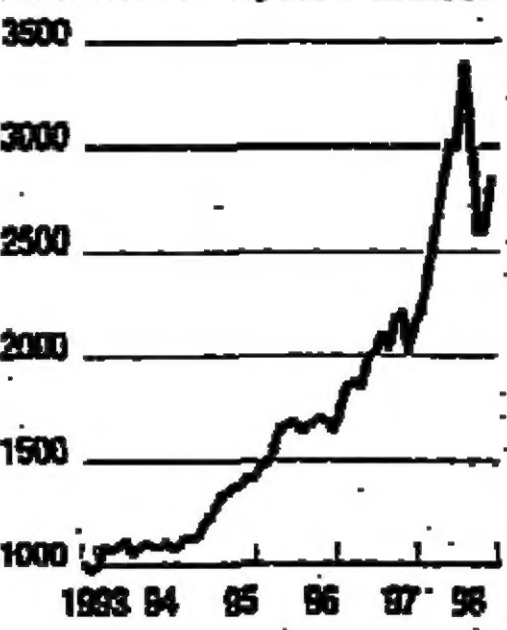
TOP FIVE OVER 5 YEARS:

GA North America Growth	3,103
Baring European Sel Opps	2,838
Invesco European Growth	2,743
TU European	2,702
Invesco European Small Cos	2,680

BOTTOM FIVE OVER 5 YEARS:

Save & Prosper Korea	252
Schroder Seoul	250
Old Mutual Thailand Acc	259
Schroder Japan Small Cos Acc	353
Save & Prosper Gold & Expt'n	381

Gartmore European Sel Opps



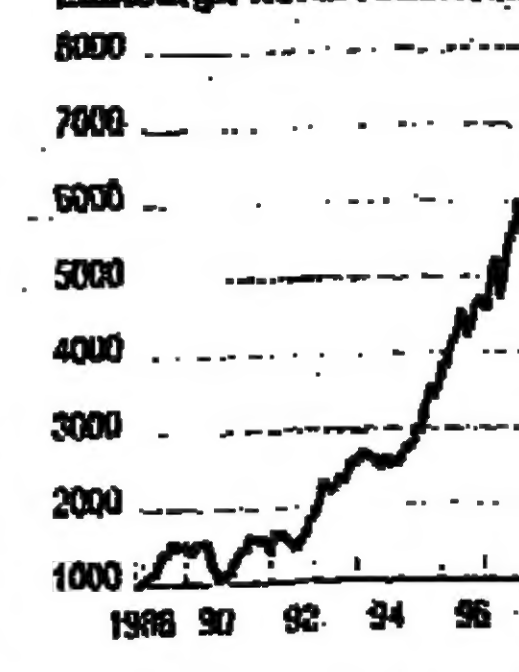
TOP FIVE OVER 10 YEARS:

GA North America Growth	8,341
FAC US Smaller Companies	8,033
Abendson Public Technology	7,873
Edinburgh North American	6,927
Hill Samuel US Smaller Cos	6,886

BOTTOM FIVE OVER 10 YEARS:

Baring Japan	378
Henderson Japan Smaller Cos	426
M&G Japan Acc	439
Invesco Japan Growth	493
Henderson Japan	535

Edinburgh North American



Tables show the result of investing £1,000 over different time periods. Trusts are ranked on 3-year performance. Warning: past performance is not a guide to future performance.

Indices

Index	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Average Unit Trust	1021	1238	1437	2800	4.3	2.5
Average Investment Trust	1051	1290	1515	3053	6.1	5.0
Bank	1046	1122	1208	1788	0.0	5.7
Building Society	1043	1114	1202	1764	0.0	5.4
Stockmarket: FTSE All-Share	1128	1556	1820	3626	3.6	3.1
Inflation	1031	1098	1180	1502	0.3	-

UK Growth

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Jupiter UK Growth Exempt	1364	2120	-	-	4.8	0.9
Johnson Fry Stellar Growth	928	1846	2048	4058	4.3	1.9
River & Mercantile 1st Growth	1083	1680	2295	-	3.5	0.9
Lloyds TSB Environmental Inv	1154	1652	1955	-	3.7	1.1
Thornhill Capital	1138	1638	1827	-	3.9	0.3
SECTOR AVERAGE	1031	1384	1684	2674	3.8	1.7

UK Growth & Income

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
CF The Utilities	1285	1763	2290	-	3.8	2.6
Fleming Select UK Income	1144	1701	2087	3108	3.8	2.7
Laurence Keen Income & Growth	1124	1646	1875	-	3.6	3.1
River & Mercantile Top 100	1155	1636	-	-	3.8	3.0
HSBC Flexible Fund	1146	1615	1843	-	3.9	1.9
SECTOR AVERAGE	1098	1428	1689	2883	3.6	2.3

UK Smaller Companies

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
GT UK Smaller Companies Acc	1214	1647	1668	-	4.3	1.3
Northwest UK Smaller Cos	913	1559	-	-	4.7	2.3
Henderson Exempt Capital	1033	1530	1673	-	4.2	1.2
Laurence Keen Smaller Cos	995	1502	2148	-	4.4	1.8
Gartmore UK Smaller Companies	873	1470	2049	2291	4.9	1.3
SECTOR AVERAGE	881	1106	1367	1795	4.4	1.9

UK Equity Income

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
BWD UK Equity Income	1108	1654	2097	3348	3.4	3.5
Premier Dividend	1189	1659	2053	2223	3.4	3.7
Jupiter Income	1052	1631	2344	4801	3.1	3.8
Fidelity Income Plus	1107	1598	1762	2438	3.2	4.2
NPI Global Core Income	1097	1554	-	-	3.0	3.3
SECTOR AVERAGE	1048	1408	1841	2769	3.3	4.0

UK Equity & Bond Income

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Abbey National Extra Income	1074	1514	1882	3365	2.4	4.4
CIS UK Income	1113	1508	1736	-	2.8	3.5
Edinburgh UK Income	1102	1488	1722	2304	2.9	3.4
Marlborough UK High Income	1085	1477	-	-	2.6	5.9
CGU PPT High Yield	1087	1468	1838	2458	2.7	5.6
SECTOR AVERAGE	1059	1345	1489	2366	2.5	5.1

UK Eq & Bd

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Canlife Income Dis	1071	1473	1685	2555	3.0	2.9
Perpetual High Income	1061	1457	1841	4425	3.8	3.7
AXA Sun Life High Yield	1056	1434	1809	2503	3.0	2.5
NPI UK Extra Income	1100	1425	1789	-	3.0	2.1
AXA Sun Life Income & Grn	1082	1409	1607	2561	3.1	2.4
SECTOR AVERAGE	1080	1401	1656	2574	3.1	2.9

UK Fixed Interest

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
CGU PPT Preference	1182	1559	1628	2361	2.3	6.0
Morgan Gren MP Annuity Conv Ex	1158	1485	-	-	1.7	5.0
Profit & Loss Interest	1123	1485	1697	2195	1.5	5.3
Henderson Preference & Bond	1101	1467	1581	2091	1.2	5.7
CGU PPT Monthly Income Plus	1125	1465	1581	-	1.7	7.0
SECTOR AVERAGE	1088	1315	1414	2169	1.4	6.0

UK Gift

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Fleming Select Long-dated Gift	1271	1637	-	-	2.1	5.5
Fidelity Institutional Lg Gift	1265	1605	-	-	2.2	5.5
Mercury Long-Dated Bond	1183	1478	1503	-	2.1	3.5
M&G Gift & Fixed Interest	1173	1426	1489	2326	1.6	4.8
Gartmore PS Fixed Interest	1173	1388	1426	2345	1.5	4.8
SECTOR AVERAGE	1127	1303	1329	2190	1.3	4.9

Far East ex Japan

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
HSBC Hong Kong Growth	954	1184	1198	5043	10.0	2.8
Friends First Australian	959	1138	1253	2772	5.1	-
INVESTCO Hong Kong & China	748	975	782	3889	10.0	2.3
Old Mutual Hong Kong	840	909	826	3829	10.9	2.1
Fidelity South East Asia	984	908	923	3547	8.1	1.4
SECTOR AVERAGE	831	950	911	2429	6.9	1.5

Far East inc Japan

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
ABG Greater China	698	882	784	1910	9.7	-
Jupiter Far Eastern	976	847	711	1702	7.4	-
Fidelity Institutional Lg Gift	938	835	595	-	5.3	1.1
Royal & SunAll Far East	982	819	776	1105	6.2	1.3
Smith & Williamson Far East	962	774	669	-	5.6	0.5
SECTOR AVERAGE	849	885	846	1431	6.5	1.0

Japan

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Martin Currie Japan	909	874	848	-	5.8	-
Newton Japan	867	867	781	922	6.1	-
Murray Japan Growth	1045	862	871	-	5.8	-
GT Japan Growth	912	851	884	1198	3.1	0.0
Baillie Gifford Japanese	946	837	795	1165	5.8	-
SECTOR AVERAGE	880	827	801	786	6.3	0.7

Europe

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
TU European	1515	2086	2702	-	4.6	1.4
Newton European	1415	2055	2650	5015	5.7	0.3
INVESTCO European Growth	1334	2022	2748	5385	6.5	-
INVESTCO European Small Cos	1364	1956	2690	5382	6.7	-
Baring German Growth	1334	1957	2131	-	6.0	0.5
SECTOR AVERAGE	1194	1618	2012	4055	6.4	0.7

Global Emerging Mkts

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Stewart Heavy Emerging Market	767	883	791	-	7.9	1.5
Gartmore PS Emerging Markets	736	841	650	-	8.0	1.4
Mercury Emerging Markets	881	824	705	-	8.5	0.3
Save & Prosper Emerging Mkts	760	781	-	-	9.3	1.3
Five Arrows PE Emerging Mkts	702	725	-	-	7.3	-
SECTOR AVERAGE	701	707	586	1874	8.0	1.3

International Equity Income

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
GT International Income	1201	1587	1757	3920	3.4	2.6
Premier Global 100	1152	1391	1524	1939	4.0	-
M&G International Income	1063	1336	1482	2022	3.5	4.2
Mayflower Global Income	1073	1335	1542	2772	3.2	2.4
SECTOR AVERAGE	1069	1407	1571	2598	3.5	2.3

International Fixed Interest

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Newton International Bond	1088	1248	1246	-	1.9	4.1
Baring Global Bond	1083	1249	1322	-	1.8	4.8
INVESTCO Int'l Fx Interest	1081	1241	1284	-	1.0	4.2
Marlborough Managed	1105	1218	1327	2436	1.7	3.5
AES Int'l Bond & Convertible	1081	1212	1250	-	1.1	6.4
SECTOR AVERAGE	1086	1086	1122	1920	1.8	4.5

International Equity & Bond

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Fleming General Opportunities	1159	1481	1636	-	2.8	3.3
GA International Bond	1110	1428	1494	-	2.8	2.7
Bank of Ireland Ex Mgt Growth	1057	1379	1632	3270	3.5	2.0
MT General	1106	1359	-	-	3.8	-
Gartmore PS Medium Term Bond	1124	1334	1522	2757	2.1	2.8
SECTOR AVERAGE	1081	1261	1380	2823	2.8	2.7

International Growth

Trust	1 year (R)	3	5	10	Volatility	Yield
Franklington Financial	1109	1712	2037	5593	5.2	0.7
Gartmore Global Utilities	1321	1688	1844	-	4.3	1.3
Save & Prosper Financial Secs	1035	1662	2188	4420	4.9	0.5
YIM Samuel Financial	1063	1536	1819	3925	4.8	1.6
Fidelity Managed International	1148	1509	1851	3905	4.4	0.5
SECTOR AVERAGE	1026	1236	1408	2892	4.8	1.2

INVESTMENT TRUSTS

WINNERS AND LOSERS

TOP FIVE OVER 1 YEAR:

Abendson Preferred Income	1,530
Abendson High Income	1,585
Foreign & Col Enterprise	1,514
Perpetual European	1,511
Jupiter Primadone Growth	1,477

BOTTOM FIVE OVER 1 YEAR:

First Russian Frontiers	141
International Biotechnology	384
Edinburgh Java	424
Foreign & Col Em Markets	429
Abendson Emerging Asia	457

Perpetual European

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10,000-150 day window 1.35 1.25 0.85 0-9999
 15,000-150 day window 7.25 3.25 7.25

NOTES
 -Owner: Connected rate of interest payable, not taking
 effect on the structure of loans rate between 1%
 and 3% of interest payable after allowing for deduction of
 bank rate interest rate
 -Drawn 60% from rate attributed to this account of
 overpaying of interest paid more than once a year.
 "Compounded Annual Fee"
 -Is the frequency at which interest is credited to the
 account

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Cash pours into Footsie to beat launch of Emu

MARKETS REPORT

By Steve Thompson,
UK Stock Market Editor

The return of confidence in London's equity market gathered more momentum yesterday, rounding off a week of exceptional gains across most areas.

Once again, it was the prospect of further cuts in domestic interest rates that was said to have been the main driving force in the market, a view helped by the downward of third-quarter gross domestic product figures yesterday.

Those interest rate expectations were mixed in with the

over-present talk of more take-over/merger activity.

Traders reported evidence of substantial overseas buying, particularly from Japan.

After a session of increasingly frantic chasing of the front-line stocks, the FTSE 100 index finished comfortably clear of the 5,700 level, only a day after recrossing 5,500.

Footsie closed 111.3 higher at 5,717.5, taking the gain for the week to 254.3 or 4.6 per cent. That increase has seen the Footsie rally from its October 5 lowest closing point of the year to 1,068 points, or 23 per cent.

The junior FTSE indices, the FTSE 250 and SmallCap, were

again left gasping in the wake of the 100 index.

Marketmakers pointed out that it has mostly been the second- and third-line stocks that have borne the brunt of the constant stream of profit warnings and disappointing trading statements.

Nevertheless, the FTSE 250 index still managed a strong performance, closing another 41.5 firmer at 4,843.0.

The head of trading at one big European investment bank said the London market's surge was a reflection of the positive outlook for UK interest rates in the short

term. He said another 25 basis points cut in rates after the next Bank of England monetary policy committee meeting on December 10 was a strong possibility.

He also said London was being driven higher by an influx of domestic and overseas money ahead of European economic and monetary union on January 1.

"Global markets will effectively close down as Emu looms up and the big global institutions do not want to be short of the markets ahead of that; so they are pumping the money in now," he said.

"All those worries about profit warnings and earnings downgrades have disappeared for the time being, but I'm sure they'll

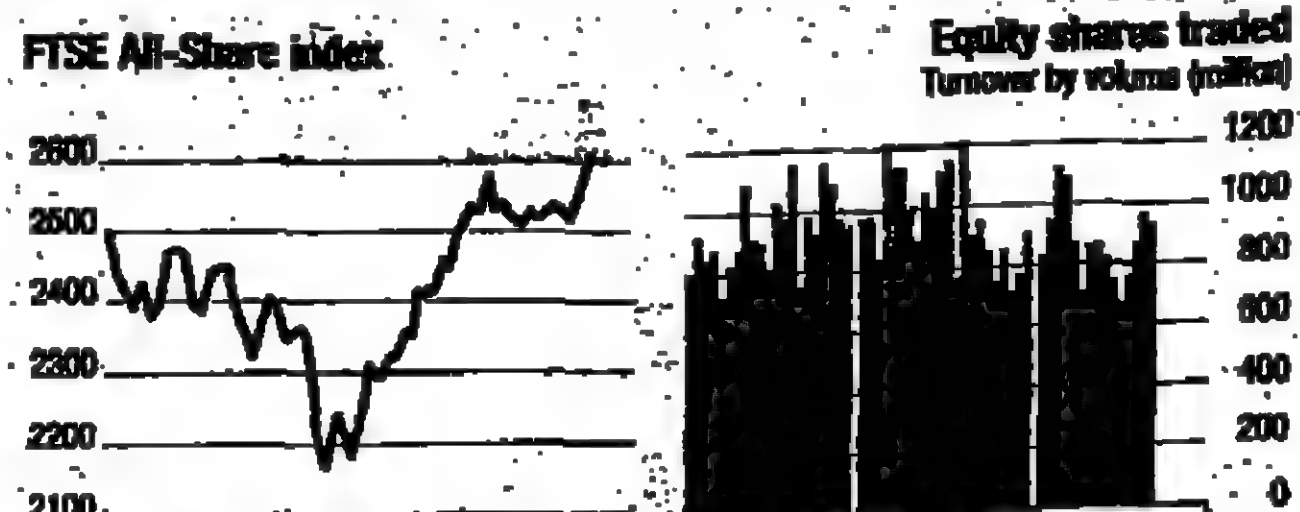
come back to haunt the market at a later stage," he warned.

Some strategists agreed with that view. Richard Jeffrey, at CCF Charterhouse Securities, said he viewed the FTSE 100 as "15 per cent overvalued".

Turnover in equities was 528.6m shares.

London took a time to get into its stride, kicking off in sedate fashion, disappointed by the lack of Footsie bid rumours that contributed to Thursday's rise.

The takeover talk did not die down for long, however, with EMI shares erupting in mid-session amid stories that an offer for the entertainment group was imminent.



Indices and ratios	Nov 20	Nov 19	Nov 18	Nov 17	Nov 16
FTSE 100	5717.5	5717.5	5717.5	5717.5	5717.5
FTSE 250	4843.0	4843.0	4843.0	4843.0	4843.0
FTSE All-Share	2611.5	2611.5	2611.5	2611.5	2611.5
FTSE All-Share yield	3.01	3.01	3.01	3.01	3.01
FT 30	3434.5	3434.5	3434.5	3434.5	3434.5
FTSE Non-Fin p/e	21.62	21.62	21.62	21.62	21.62
FTSE 100 P/E Dec	5753.0	5753.0	5753.0	5753.0	5753.0
10 yr Gilt yield	4.93	4.93	4.93	4.93	4.93
Long gbt/equity yield ratio	1.53	1.53	1.53	1.53	1.53

TRADING VOLUME IN MAJOR STOCKS

Stock	Vol.	Chg.	Day's change
AAVE	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Group	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%

EQUITY FUTURES AND OPTIONS TRADING

Stock	Vol.	Chg.	Day's change
AAVE	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Group	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%
AAVE Indent	1,200	+42	+3.2%

Bid-hungry investors eye EMI

COMPANIES REPORT

By Joel Khazoo and Martin Brice

A market eager for bid activity turned its spotlight on music publisher EMI Group, once regarded as one of the companies most likely to be taken over this year.

The latest spate of bid rumours suggested News Corp was in merger talks with the UK company. Analysts were quick to dismiss such talk. One said: "Of all the possible bidders for EMI, I think this is one of the most unlikely."

However, a feeling that something was about to happen to boost activity in the stock yesterday afternoon and the shares soared, eventually closing 56p, or nearly 17 per cent ahead of 382p, by far the best performer in the FTSE 100. Volume was a heavy 7m.

The group reports interim figures on Tuesday and one specialist on the sector said: "I think an announcement of a distribution alliance, maybe with a European group, is more likely at this stage than a bid."

The "for sale" sign made the "for sale" sign more than 18 months ago, but Canadian group Seagram was rumoured to have walked away from a merger in May after the British group was reported to have demanded 700p a share. The group has underperformed the market by 65 per cent after emerging from rental group Thorn. Since January it has lagged the FTSE All-Share by 38 per cent.

Early signs of nervousness over the outcome of forthcoming legal actions against UK tobacco companies were in evidence as HSBC produced a weighty research

document on the issue and advised clients to reduce weightings from overweight to neutral.

Nick Barker at the broker yesterday downgraded Gallaher and Imperial Tobacco from "add" to "hold" and told clients: "Our concern is prompted by a sense that investors have become too dismissive of the UK tobacco litigation." However, BAT is not involved in the UK case and he maintains his "add" stance on the shares.

His comments may signify a faltering in the powerful rally enjoyed by Gallaher and Imperial, during which they have outperformed the market by 50 per cent in the past six months as investors have sought their defensive properties amid market turmoil. He said: "Since the UK litigation is a major issue for the companies, we think near-term caution is required about both."

Gallaher was down 2p to 415p as 3.2m were traded, while Imperial was up 7p to 675p. BAT gained 17p to 582p in volume of 7.5m, one of the busiest FTSE stocks.

Marks and Spencer closed 5 ahead at 440p amid rumours the company will soon issue a holding statement on the successor to the chairman. Speculation was a name would not be announced until after Christmas.

Oil giant British Petroleum was said to have hung up the "for sale" sign more than 18 months ago, but Canadian group Seagram was rumoured to have walked away from a merger in May after the British group was reported to have demanded 700p a share. The group has underperformed the market by 65 per cent after emerging from rental group Thorn. Since January it has lagged the FTSE All-Share by 38 per cent.

Early signs of nervousness over the outcome of forthcoming legal actions against UK tobacco companies were in evidence as HSBC produced a weighty research

MAIN MOVERS

FTSE 350

Close

Day's change

Day's % change

RSE

AAVE

AAVE Group

AAVE Indent

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quantities of oil in a well near the islands. Both Desire Petroleum and Westmont fall the same amount, 22 per cent or 6p to 22p.

Pace Micro gained more than 20 per cent or 14p to 38p after the maker of digital and analogue satellite receivers said fully-year profits were likely to exceed market expectations of 57m. Analysts were said to be upgrading forecasts to 81.5m.

Energis was up 15p to 211.2p as a round of presentations started in the US following interim results on Tuesday from the telecommunications company, in which National Grid has a 50 per cent stake.

Small-cap educational products and pharmaceutical company Novartis fell 6p to 60p after it said spending from state schools was falling. Its UK educational business accounts for 43 per cent of profits. It also warned of a 56m charge this year for moving to new premises.

The shares fell despite the announcement of a 131m profit on the sale of its medical business.

Staceoach was off 7p to 235p as regulatory worries grew on news fellow bus operator Arriva would be required to sell some bus operations in Luton.

Aim-traded Fibernet gained 30p to 336p after the electronic networking group said the market for telecommunications was showing signs of slackening and it might form an alliance with a larger group.

Chemicals group Yule Catto suffered one of the worst performances in the FTSE 250 as it announced that the closure of a factory would cost it 54m. The shares, which stood at 435p earlier this year, were down 8p to 278p.

Hill & Smith Holdings, was the latest small engineer to warn on profits. It fell 1p in early trading after saying profits would be below expectations. A late rally saw it gain a penny to 374p.

FT 30 INDEX

	Nov 20	Nov 19	Nov 18	Nov 17	Nov 16	Yr ago
FT 30	3434.5	3368.2	3292.6	3307.9	3324.4	3204.6
Ord. div. yield	3.04	3.10	3.18	3.17	3.17	3.53
P/E ratio nat	22.04	21.62	21.10	21.16	21.15	20.86
P/E ratio int	21.95	21.53	21.01	21.07	21.06	20.57
FT 30 price consolidation	from 4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 16 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 17 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 18 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 19 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 20 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 21 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 22 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 23 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 24 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 25 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 26 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 27 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 28 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 29 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9
Nov 30 2016	4104.8	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9	4167.9

LONDON SHARE SERVICE

OTHER INVESTMENT TRUSTS

Table with 2 columns: Name, Price. Includes entries like Aberdeen Fund, Aberdeen Income, etc.

INVESTMENT COMPANIES

Table with 2 columns: Name, Price. Includes entries like Anglo American, Anglo Irish, etc.

LEISURE & HOTELS

Table with 2 columns: Name, Price. Includes entries like Hilton Hotels, Holiday Inns, etc.

LIFE ASSURANCE

Table with 2 columns: Name, Price. Includes entries like Aviva, Prudential, etc.

MEDIA - Continued

Table with 2 columns: Name, Price. Includes entries like BBC, ITV, etc.

PROPERTY - Continued

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AIM Alternative Investment Market. The AIM Alternative Investment Market, designed to provide a platform for the listing and trading of shares of companies that are not listed on the London Stock Exchange, is now open for business.

Table with multiple columns: Name, Price, etc. Includes entries like Anglo American, Anglo Irish, etc.

NEWS DIGEST

ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT

Memory shortfall on change to Easdaq

Memory Corporation, a designer of proprietary semiconductor devices, raised only \$2.33m against a target of \$20m (£11.9m) as it switched from Aim to Easdaq, the Brussels-based pan-European stock exchange. David Savage, chief executive, admitted that the smaller than planned cash inflow was not good for the company, but "it was absolutely the right thing to do to maintain shareholder value". The group had not been prepared to discount the dollar-denominated Global Depositary Receipts that will be traded on Easdaq like ordinary shares.

The placing of 217,395 GDRs represented 5.43m ordinary shares at 28p each. The shares closed last night at 24p, down 1 1/2p. They will cease to be listed on Aim in about six weeks. David Blackwell

Pace expects to beat forecasts

Shares in Pace Micro Technology, the maker of receivers for digital television, leapt 14p to 83p after the group said interim profits would beat expectations. Pace, which has in the past issued a string of profit warnings, said the successful launch of digital television in the UK would lift pre-tax profits for the six months to the end of May 1999 above market expectations of £7m.

British Sky Broadcasting, the satellite company, launched a 140-channel digital service last month, and On Digital began broadcasting 30 digital terrestrial channels last weekend. Pace is supplying set-top boxes, needed to unscramble digital signals, to both BSkyB and On Digital. Cathy Newman

ENGINEERING

Torotrak agreement with GM

Torotrak, the developer of a vehicle transmission system, has signed an agreement with General Motors of the US for further technical evaluation and development of its system. In return for a series of downpayments, GM has rights to take Torotrak's technology through to production. The initial contract value is \$750,000 (£446,000) and brings the payments made and payable under all its licence agreements to more than \$18m. The shares closed 6p up to 104 1/2p.

OIL EXPLORATION

Ramco wins MMS Petroleum

Ramco Energy, the Aim-listed oil exploration company with interests in the Czech Republic and Poland, has declared its offer for MMS Petroleum unconditional after gaining acceptances for 62.27 per cent of the shares. Last month's cash offer of 35p a share values MMS at £4.27m; it trumped an all-paper offer in September from Greenwich Resources. Ramco shares closed down 7 1/2p at 367 1/2p. Thorold Barker

IN BRIEF

CITY OF LONDON PR Group has agreed in principle to purchase Boswell City Financial PR, a smaller consultancy. COLPR said Boswell would provide enable it to diversify beyond the natural resources sector in which it specialises. The consideration was not disclosed.

SAVILLE GORDON Estates has exchanged contracts for the sale of its 77,000 sq ft Colwyn Centre in Colwyn Bay for a total of £8.9m, to Modus Properties. The consideration is £7.7m cash and the remainder in the form of two fully let industrial properties in Bolton with an annual rent of £100,000.

SKILLSGROUP has acquired ISL on behalf of its operating business Acuma for a maximum £2.9m. ISL is a provider of business intelligence solutions to corporate customers. Pre-tax profits for the 10 months to October 31 are estimated at £200,000. Net assets are £100,000.

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FOOTBALL PRICE THOUGHT TO BE STUMBLING BLOCK FOR MEDIA GROUP BUT UNITED NEWS SHOWS INTEREST IN TV RIGHTS

Carlton abandons talks with Arsenal

By Cathy Newman

Carlton Communications, the media group, yesterday called off talks with Arsenal, damping City expectations that British Sky Broadcasting's proposed takeover of Manchester United would be followed by similar bids for other football clubs.

Carlton issued a brief statement saying it had ended talks that may have led to an offer for the club. Negotiations with Arsenal are thought to have foundered over price.

Since August, when BSkyB bid £223.4m for Manchester United, speculation has mounted that media companies such as Carlton and United News & Media would follow suit and acquire other clubs. However, Carlton's withdrawal yesterday made analysts more sceptical about further such deals.

Carlton's announcement coincided with reports that

United News was on the brink of taking a significant stake in Arsenal. However, United News played down the rumours, saying it was "interested in media rights, not in managing football clubs".

It said no deal was imminent and added it would only consider buying a stake in Arsenal in exchange for the rights to show some of the club's games on a television channel.

Analysts were divided in their response. One said: "The TV companies are interested in the rights. You don't have to buy the club to secure the rights."

Both Carlton and United News may develop channels with football clubs. Carlton could, for example, set up a football channel, and offer it exclusively to subscribers to On Digital, the pay-TV group in which it has a 50 per cent stake.

However, Lorna Tilburn, media analyst at WestLB

Panmure, believed United News could still be interested in buying a substantial stake in a club. Another analyst said Carlton may have withdrawn because it felt the spectre of a rival bidder was pushing up the price.

Regulatory problems surrounding the purchase of football clubs by media companies may also have influenced Carlton's decision. Last month, BSkyB's bid for Manchester United lapsed after it was referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission because of "concerns for the wider public interest". The MMC is due to give its verdict on March 12.

Carlton's withdrawal will put further pressure on Arsenal to find an alternative source of fresh capital. The club needs the money to finance either the redevelopment of its Highbury stadium or a new ground.

Carlton's shares initially fell sharply, but later closed up 1/2p at 457 1/2p.



Michael Green, chairman of Carlton. Regulatory problems may have also influenced decision

EMI says it has not talked to News Corp

By Alice Rawsthorn

EMI, the music group, denied yesterday that it had been in discussions with News Corporation about a possible investment by Rupert Murdoch's media company.

The statement, issued after the market had closed, followed a 17 per cent increase in the shares amid speculation over a possible link-up.

The 56 1/2p rise to 392p made EMI - a long-running takeover target and often prey to speculative interest - by far the strongest performer in the FTSE 100.

Reports of News Corp's interest in EMI - which represents a string of best-selling acts including Spice Girls, Garth Brooks, the Verve and Radiohead - appeared in Thursday's edition of *Riffs*, a US music industry magazine.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported in yesterday's edition that senior News Corp executives met EMI's management two weeks ago to discuss the possibility of making an investment in the UK group.

EMI, which is expected to report a sharp reduction in interim profits on Tuesday, denied that any such meeting took place.

Until the News Corp speculation surfaced, EMI's shares had underperformed the FTSE 100 by 40 per cent since the start of the year.

The shares have underperformed by 30 per cent since March, when the board confirmed it had received an approach from an unnamed company, later identified as Seagram, the Canadian entertainment group.

Seagram subsequently broke off talks with EMI to negotiate an \$11bn (£6.5bn) offer for PolyGram, the Dutch music and film concern. EMI's shares have since drifted lower in spite of intermittent rumours of another bid, possibly from Bertelsmann, the German media and music group.

News Corp has also been mooted as a possible purchaser for EMI. Mr Murdoch's youngest son, James, ran a small New York record label before joining the family firm to take charge of its new media division.

News Corp has subsequently taken control of Mushroom Records, the Sydney-based label, and made a modest investment to expand its music interests elsewhere.

Despite his son's enthusiasm for music, Mr Murdoch has previously denied plans to expand aggressively in the music industry, arguing that its growth prospects are not strong enough.

Restaurant groups serve up good cheer

By David Blackwell

The high street slowdown hitting retailers such as Marks and Spencer and Storehouse appears to be leaving parts of the restaurant business relatively unscathed.

Both PizzaExpress and Groups Chez Gerard yesterday gave upbeat trading statements to their annual meetings. Shares in PizzaEx-

press moved up 31p to close at 80 1/2p, while Chez Gerard's closed unchanged at 194p.

David Page, chairman of PizzaExpress, said: "For 18 months we have been waiting for the sky to fall in - but the sky is blue and clear."

Analysts said both groups were offering more exotic meals than the standard fare in pubs, which have also been showing signs of the

onset of recession. "Clearly trading is a little slower - but the slowdown is nothing like what we are hearing from the retailers," said one.

Neville Abraham, chairman of Chez Gerard, suggested that people were reconsidering whether to buy items such as carpets and clothing, but were not yet prepared to change their lifestyle, especially if they had no children.

"Eating out has moved up the list of essentials," he said. "People will watch their spending and go for good value, but they are definitely not going to stop at home twiddling their thumbs or slaving over a hot stove."

Mr Page said the consumer slowdown was reflected in a slight fall in lunches served, but evening meals - about 70 per cent of

turnover - were way ahead of last year.

PizzaExpress described current trading as satisfactory with like-for-like sales slightly below last year, when the gain was almost 9 per cent.

Chez Gerard told its shareholders that it was encouraged by the level of bookings ahead of Christmas, and remained confident of its "ability to outperform".

Booker appointee to tackle cash-and-carry

By David Blackwell

Booker, the distribution group, yesterday appointed a 33-year-old consultant to the board to help Stuart Rose, chief executive, turn the business round.

Mr Rose, who after just four weeks in the job warned 10 days ago that the group might breach its banking covenants, said that Charles Wilson would become his right-hand man in sorting out the key cash-and-carry business.

Mr Wilson is giving up his consultancy business and will start at Booker immediately. His appointment takes the number of executive directors to three, and Mr Rose said at least one other board appointment could be expected.

Analysts said Mr Rose had been faced with an unpleasant shock when he became chief executive, but had quickly tackled the problems. "Obviously he needs help and needs it fast in order to turn this group around," said one.

The two men met when Mr Wilson was acting as a strategic consultant to projects at Debenhams and Burton.



Charles Wilson

Mr Rose described Mr Wilson - author of two business books - as a specialist in retail businesses, with a particular emphasis on supply-chain management.

Mr Wilson would devote up to 80 per cent of his time to the cash-and-carry business, making sure the recovery plan was properly executed, said Mr Rose. He refused to disclose Mr Wilson's remuneration but said it would be appropriate for the job.

Booker this month issued its third profits warning in 12 months and dismissed Adrian Busby, head of the cash-and-carry operations.

The trading statement, which also warned that there would be no final dividend, said the expected sales improvement at the cash-and-carry operations had not materialised following extensive restructuring since the £264m acquisition of Nurdin & Peacock in 1996.

Booker Belmont Wholesale has 40 per cent of the UK cash-and-carry market with sales of £3.5bn a year, but has failed to prosper.

Mr Rose, who has taken it under his direct control, said the aim was to make the most of trading in the run-up to Christmas, and then put in place long-term solutions in the new year.

The group, burdened with average net debt of £500m, is continuing negotiations with its bankers. Mr Rose said yesterday that the banks were happy with his plans for the group.

DNP orchestrates £10.5m Symphony Telecom deal

By Alan Cane

Direct Network Publishing, a two-year old Ofex-listed internet group, is buying privately held Symphony Telecom communications for £10.5m (£17.8m).

The deal exemplifies the convergence of content and telephony in the modern communications industry.

DNP is raising £14m through a placing of 17.8m shares at 80p to fund the acquisition, provide working capital and launch new business ventures. The placing, which has not been underwritten, is being arranged by Durlacher, the investment bank.

The consideration comprises £5.5m in cash with the remainder in new shares.

Under the Ofex code, DNP's shares have been suspended. The intention is to list on Nasdaq after the acquisition and placing rather than seek readmission to Ofex.

DNP publishes entertainment and information over the internet under the 365 brand. Its business model is based on the idea that there is a large potential market for electronic information targeted at customers' "passion centres" - strong interests - using personalised delivery techniques.

It operates an electronic publishing system capable of creating specialist magazines complete with pictures, text and graphics that can be mailed over the internet. The first is Football 365;

Cricket 365 is in preparation.

The group's customers are able to download customised versions of the magazines and read them directly from the hard drive on their personal computers. DNP derives revenues from advertising and subscription to personalised services. In the 11 months to July 31 the company made a loss of just over £1m.

Symphony provides a variety of premium rate information services such as weather reports or daily horoscopes. Callers have access to the services through a freephone number and pay by credit or debit card.

It made \$475,000 in the six months to September 30 on revenues of £1.62m.

Japanese banks' problem loans total rises

By Gillian Tett in Tokyo

Japan's nine large commercial banks held ¥12,341bn (\$103bn) of problem loans at the end of September, little changed from the March level of ¥12,312bn, it emerged yesterday. However, the banks also said they had written off about ¥1,400bn in this period. Consequently, the data suggests that the bad loan total is continuing to rise in spite of the banks' efforts to tackle the problem.

The banks yesterday pledged to accelerate their efforts in the second half of the year. They now expect to write off ¥5,080bn of problem loans in the whole of fiscal 1998, against an earlier estimate of ¥1,200bn.

Though this may boost hopes that Japanese banks are finally taking serious action to tackle their mountain of bad loans, it will also raise the pressure on them to expand their capital base. Of the seven banks that reported yesterday, only Tokai had a capital adequacy ratio over 10 per cent, calculated according to the Japanese version of standards set by the Bank for International Settlements.

The remaining six - Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, Dai-ichi Kangyo, Sumitomo, Sakura, Fuyo and Sanwa - reported ratios around 9 per cent. Sanwa and Daiwa, which reported their results on Thursday, had ratios of 9.7 per cent and 10.38 per cent respectively.

However, these Japanese BIS standards flatter the banks, since they allow them to ignore paper losses on their equity holdings that arise from the low stock market.

Although BTM and Sanwa reported that the book value of their portfolios was worth more than the market value on September 30, all the others reported paper losses, ranging between ¥52bn for Sanwa and ¥580bn for Fuyo.

The banks all reported a rise in operating profits, partly due to the recent rally in the Japanese bond market. They also all reported parent pre-tax profits for the first half of the fiscal year, ranging from ¥7.1bn at Sanwa to ¥73.62bn at DKB. However, seven of them warned that they would report pre-tax losses for the whole year due to bad loan disposals.

The banks' burden

	Loan-loss charges (¥bn)			Total problem loans (¥'000bn)		
	First half	Forecast full year	Previous forecast	1997-98	Sep 98	Mar 98
BTM	301.3	550	270	1310	1.86	2.26
DKB	160.8	300	150	740	0.94	1.47
Sumitomo	144.6	297.4	80-100	1040	1.53	1.47
Sanwa	216	600	180	940	1.43	1.29
Sakura	168.6	910	160-150	1180	1.50	1.47
Fuyo	161.4	500	100-150	1000	1.64	1.69
Total	1117.7	2500	70	4160	1.20	1.22
Asset	91.8	400	100	480	1.03	0.98
Capital	54	230	40	280	0.93	0.96
Total	1,364.7	5,077.4	1,120-1,200	7480	12.34	12.61

Source: Reuters

Figures are for financial year ending March 31

Flemings to form Nordic venture

By Jane Martinson, Investment Correspondent

Flemings, the UK investment bank and asset manager, is set to form a joint venture with Aros Securities, the Nordic investment bank. The agreement covers corporate finance, equity capital markets and securities services.

Aros, which is owned by Unibank, Denmark's second largest commercial bank, operates in Sweden, Finland and Norway but is best known in Denmark.

The deal is Flemings' second European joint venture this year following a deal with Banco Comercial Portugues, a Portuguese bank.

Flemings works in 44 countries but has no investment banking operations in the main countries served by Aros, which was bought by Unibank two years ago. Both sides will share resources as part of the joint venture, which will start in the new year.

Flemings said it had no plans to buy a greater stake in Aros. Its largest joint venture is with Jardine Matheson, in Asia.

السؤال الأول

COMPANIES & FINANCE

Finland exchange confirms link with Eurex

By Tim Burt in Stockholm

Finland's stock exchange is planning to join the wave of consolidation among European stock exchanges by signing a strategic alliance with Eurex, the joint derivatives market of Deutsche Börse and Swiss Exchange. It will also seek membership of the prospective London-Frankfurt equity trading alliance.

Senior officials at Heli, the Finnish Helsinki Exchange, yesterday confirmed they had signed a letter of intent

to join Eurex after the breakdown of alliance talks last week with OM Gruppen, the operator of the Stockholm bourse.

The move also signals Helsinki's withdrawal from a possible pan-Nordic alliance led by Stockholm and Copenhagen, which are uniting their equity trading next year.

Stockholm and Copenhagen are also considering pooling their bond and derivatives trading operations.

Helsinki's decision to pursue a partnership with

Eurex, the world's second largest derivatives market, signals the end of a three-year attempt to reach agreement on a joint derivatives market with OM.

Under the proposed Eurex alliance, Finnish derivatives trading handled by Heli is expected to be transferred to the enlarged Swiss-German market next year.

As part of the tie-up, Helsinki said it would begin talks on adopting Deutsche Börse's Xetra securities trading system - which would pave the way for its admission

to the London-Frankfurt equity trading alliance.

"We are now in the front line in the restructuring of the European exchanges," said Juhani Erma, chief executive of the Helsinki stock exchange, which had a turnover of \$47bn in the first nine months of this year.

The new alliance mirrors the decision this week by the Madrid bourse to join the Anglo-German partnership, with Milan and Amsterdam also indicating interest in taking part.

That prompted Paris on Thursday to call for a single system for trading shares in European blue-chip companies, and to convene a meeting next week of nine European stock exchange heads.

OM Gruppen, which owns 21 per cent of Heli, yesterday expressed regret at Helsinki's decision but said it would not make any attempt to block the proposed tie-up with Eurex.

Bengt Rydén, executive chairman of the Stockholm Exchange, also emphasised

that OM was determined to press ahead with creating a pan-Nordic exchange, known as Norex.

"That ambition is not dead and there is a possibility that Oslo - once it has gone through structural reform - will want to join Norex," he added.

Senior officials at OM are to attend next week's stock exchange meeting in Paris, along with the heads of the Amsterdam, Brussels, Frankfurt, London, Madrid, Milan, Paris, London and Zurich exchanges.

BTM aims to expand without state funding

By Gillian Tett in Tokyo

The Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi, the country's largest bank, yesterday started Japan's financial reform by declaring that it would probably not apply for government funds to expand its capital base.

Instead, the bank will boost its financial strength by issuing ¥240bn preferred shares, selling its Tokyo headquarters and selling about 20 per cent of its stake in UnionBank, its US subsidiary.

Shigemitsu Miki, BTM deputy president, said: "We think we can achieve financial strength on our own." The move marks an embarrassing blow for the government's attempts to revitalise the banking sector by using up to ¥250,000bn (\$208bn) to expand the banks' capital bases. BTM has traditionally been considered an industry leader and currently heads the banking industry association.

However, six other banks indicated yesterday that they would each probably apply for between ¥300bn and ¥700bn in public funds. They are Dai-ichi Kangyo, Sumitomo, Sakura, Fuji, Tokai and Asahi.

With Sanwa and Daiwa

having indicated their intention to ask for funds earlier this week, these banks are collectively seeking up to ¥4,000bn of aid. Japan's remaining 10 large banks will announce their results next week, and most are expected to apply for funds.

The government insists public fund injections represent a crucial part of the ¥80,000bn support scheme announced this autumn to resolve Japan's banking problems. But in recent weeks many banks have privately expressed concern that accepting public funds could leave them vulnerable to political pressure. BTM yesterday said that it planned to raise its capital adequacy ratio to 10 per cent next March; it was 9.06 per cent at the end of September. It is to issue ¥240bn new shares, primarily to other companies in the Mitsubishi *keiretsu*, or business group, and is considering raising additional capital overseas. The bank expects to raise a further ¥750bn from selling part of its stake in UnionBank, to bring its holding down to about 60 per cent. The sale of its Tokyo headquarters will raise a further ¥60bn. The bank also pledged to cut its workforce by 3,000 to 15,500 over the next three years.

Credit companies line up to topple cash as king

The rustle of rupees is giving way to the swipe of cards as India catches on to the convenience of credit, writes Krishna Guha

The south Bombay jeweller agrees a price for the gold and diamond necklace soon to adorn the wife of one of the city's more prosperous businessmen. Her husband reaches into his case and takes out bundles of neatly stapled hundred-note blocks of Rs10,000 (\$236). This is a cash transaction.

Across the city the crowded lanes of the "Thieves' Bazaar" tell a similar story. Everything on sale - giant mounds of watermelons, broken watches, spare car parts, antique furniture - is being bought with cash. The swipe of credit cards, debit cards and charge cards is nowhere to be heard. Cash is king.

"We in India are a cash society," says M. S. Verma, chairman of State Bank, the biggest in the country. "We have been like this for centuries."

It may not remain like that for long. This week Mr Verma and joint venture partner Gary Wendt, chairman of GE Capital of the US, met in Bombay to launch the SBI Card, a Visa card. This, according to Mr Verma, will become the currency of modern India.

Only a few days before, American Express launched

its own rupee credit card with similar fanfare.

The new entrants are the latest to see the attraction of India's fast-growing credit card market. Bank of India and Bank of Baroda, Citibank, Standard Chartered, ANZ Grindlays and Hongkong Bank already issue

'Not many of us feel comfortable moving about with Rs10,000 in our pockets'

cards here. However, their use is only just beginning to take off, boosted by the banks' new-found enthusiasm for Indian retail business.

American Express estimates that there are 3m cardholders in India, and the number is growing at 30 per cent a year. Spending on these cards is estimated to be \$1.2bn, and this is growing at an even faster rate, says Sanjay Rishi, head of American Express in India.

State Bank, GE Capital and Visa are equally upbeat. They expect the number of

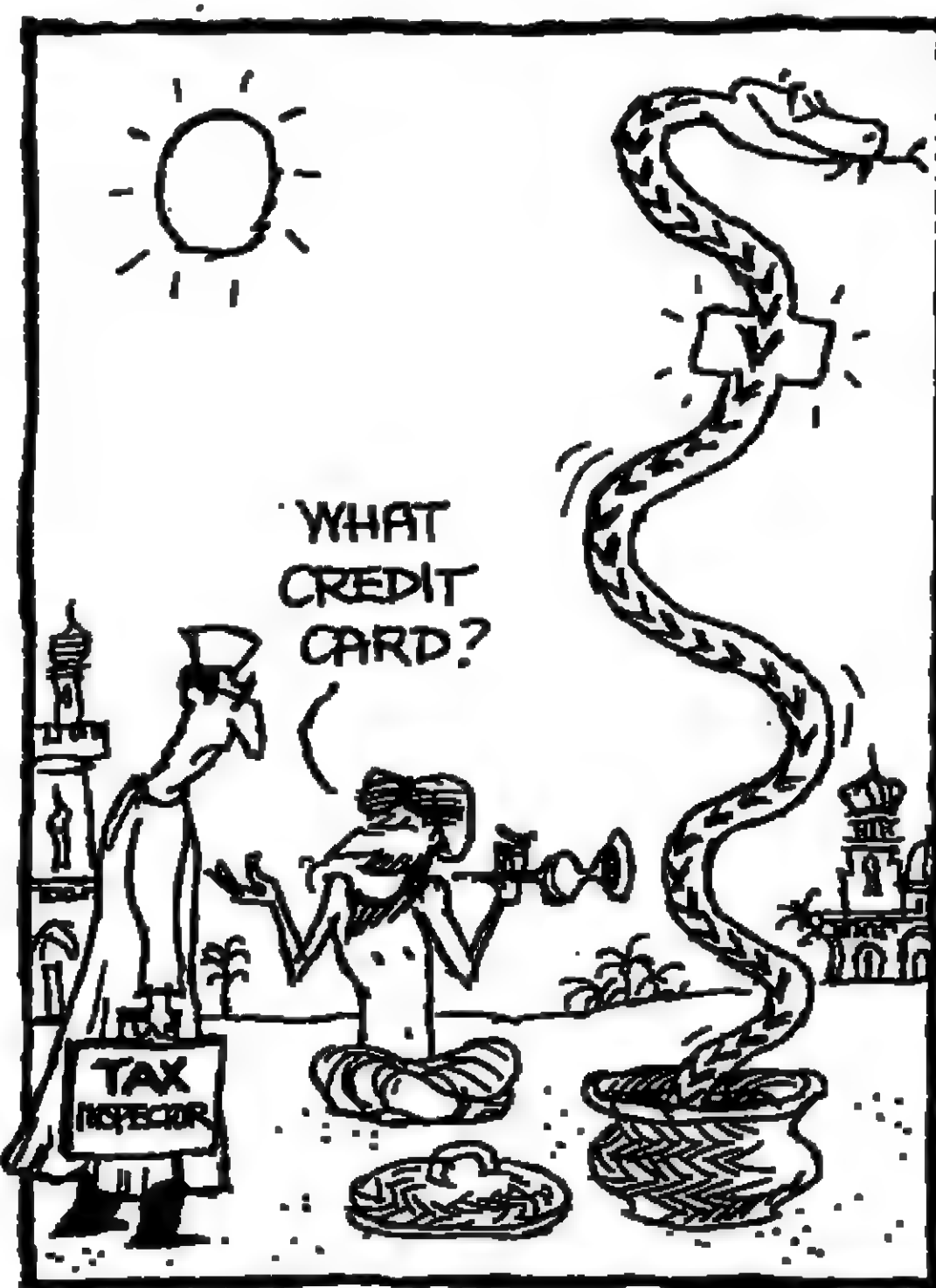
cards in issue to rise from 1.7m in 1996 to 6m at the turn of the century, with spending rising 40 per cent a year to top \$3bn by 2000. The demand for credit is being driven by cultural changes associated with the liberalisation of the Indian economy. Indians now have more disposable income, and a deluge of global brands and associated advertising has encouraged Indians to make aspirational purchases. At the same time, traditional aversion to debt is weakening, though Indians still remain conservative in their finances.

Meanwhile, a crime wave has made many cautious about carrying large bundles of cash. "Today, not many of us feel very comfortable moving about with Rs10,000 in our pockets," says Mr Verma.

Greater competition has spurred banks to market cards. About 100,000 shops, hotels and restaurants in India now accept Visa and Mastercard. About 30,000 accept American Express.

"It is an extremely immature market," says Richard Cromwell, who heads Hongkong Bank's credit card and personal banking division in India.

Almost all issuers opt for a



near-identical and very low income threshold - between Rs60,000 and Rs75,000 a year, which makes about 8m eligible for cards today. As a result, most companies compete for the same people in the same big cities.

State Bank and GE Capital, however, plan to use the bank's 9,000 branches to

offer cards nationwide, says Mr Wendt.

Other issuers are starting to offer niche products, such as affinity cards, loyalty programmes and dollar denominated cards for Indians travelling abroad. Because the rupee is not fully convertible.

While bankers admit that

there are risks involved in handing out cards to people earning less than \$2,000, they point out that this is income declared for tax purposes. "Real income is often much higher, and credit limits are low. We do not find delinquency rates are high," says Mr Cromwell.

But risk control is hampered by the lack of reliable customer data and pooled information. The best banks invest heavily in checking systems and verification agents, who make house calls.

State interference poses a bigger threat to India's budding card revolution. The banks recently persuaded the local government in Bombay to withdraw a 1 per cent surcharge on card purchases, which had stunted growth in the country's biggest credit card market.

However, India's finance minister this year added cards to the list of prestige assets that denote wealth and oblige their owners to file tax returns. If there is one thing rich Indians fear more than thugs and extortionists, it is a visit from the tax inspector.

Bankers fear that any big crack-down on cardholders could remind them that bundles of notes have one big advantage over cards: they leave no trace of their owner's wealth.

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NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MARKETS									
Figures in parentheses show number of firms of stock	US Dollar Index	Day's Change	Percent Change	YTD Index	YTD Change	DM Index	YTD Change	Local Currency Index	Local % chg on day
Australia (75)	199.32	-0.5	-0.25	177.16	149.68	174.08	205.38	0.3	3.84
Austria (25)	180.36	-0.8	-0.44	180.31	135.44	157.53	157.42	-0.1	-0.22
Belgium (22)	372.24	-0.1	-0.03	330.85	276.53	325.12	318.08	0.8	2.12
Canada (118)	169.94	-0.2	-0.12	144.92	122.36	142.71	358.08	-0.3	-0.20
Denmark (24)	195.15	-0.2	-0.10	173.45	146.55	170.44	218.82	1.8	1.81
France (208)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Germany (25)	173.11	-0.3	-0.17	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Greece (33)	173.11	-0.3	-0.17	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Hong Kong (97)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
India (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Indonesia (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Italy (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Japan (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Malaysia (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Netherlands (27)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
New Zealand (18)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Norway (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Philippines (22)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Portugal (18)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Singapore (11)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
South Africa (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Spain (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Sweden (16)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Switzerland (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Thailand (25)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
United Kingdom (208)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
USA (1620)	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
DOLLAR INDEX									
US	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
UK	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
DM	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Yen	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16
Local	168.47	-0.3	-0.18	140.49	344.29	400.43	386.36	-0.6	-0.16

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IN THE MATTER OF
ROYAL ORNAMENT PLC
IN THE MATTER OF THE
COMPANIES ACT 1985
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a
Petition was on the 9th November 1998
presented to His Majesty's High Court of
Justice for the confirmation of the collection
of the capital of the above named Company
from £300,000 to £500,000.
AND NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN that
the said Petition is directed to be heard
before the Chancery Court Registrar at the
Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London
WC2A 2LL on Wednesday 27th December
1998.
ANY creditor or shareholder of the said
Company desiring to oppose the making of
an Order for the confirmation of the said
collection of capital should appear at the
time of hearing in person or by Counsel for
that purpose.
A copy of the said Petition will be furnished
to any such person requesting the same by
email notification or by post on payment of
the regulated charge for the same.
DATED the 21st day of November 1998
Slaughter and May
35, Bedford Square, London WC1R 4EJ
Tel: 0171 600 1200
Ref: 0004

LEGAL NOTICE
No. 00376 of 1998
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CHANCERY DIVISION
COMPANIES COURT
IN THE MATTER OF
BOBBY & SONS PLC
- and -
IN THE MATTER OF THE
COMPANIES ACT 1985
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Order
of the High Court of Justice, Chancery Division
relating to the above named Company, dated
11th November 1998 confirming the reduction
of the Share Premium Account by £11A
will be



COMPANIES **FT** MARKETS

Weekend November 21/November 22 1998



Deutsche set to close Bankers Trust deal

By William Lewis and Tracy Carvillan in New York and Tony Barber in Frankfurt

Deutsche Bank, Germany's largest bank, is close to concluding a takeover agreement with Bankers Trust, the eighth largest bank holding company in the US.

People close to the takeover talks yesterday said an announcement was provisionally planned for November 30. However, it could be brought forward as rumours of the deal were mounting among traders in the US and German markets. Yesterday morning, Bankers Trust's stock price rose 5.91 per cent or \$4.4 to \$76.04 on rumours of the deal. Deutsche's stock price closed up almost 5 per cent yesterday to DM106. If completed at more than Bankers Trust's current market capitalisation of \$7.5bn, it would be one of the three largest cross-border financial services deals.

The Financial Times disclosed last month that Deutsche and Bankers Trust had begun preliminary takeover talks. Since then, people close to the companies say the talks have progressed rapidly and that Deutsche's due diligence is progressing smoothly.

They said the deal was still days from being signed and that, in spite of the advanced nature of the negotiations, either side could back out of the talks. "It is not a done deal yet, but it is expected to be," said one person with knowledge of negotiations.

Deutsche and Bankers Trust declined to comment. Deutsche is being advised by Goldman Sachs and Bankers Trust by Morgan Stanley Dean Witter. Both investment banks also declined to comment.

Bankers Trust's current market capitalisation is about \$7.5bn. This means that its stock is trading at some 1.7 times its book value of \$4.3bn, about the average for the US investment banking and brokerage sector. However, that is substantially below the 2.4

multiple to book which investment banks reached at the end of 1997, according to Michael Lipper of Lipper Analytical.

The recent market turbulence is said to have led senior executives at Bankers Trust to conclude that its \$4.7bn of stockholders equity and focus on specialist businesses left it ill-equipped to weather a future prolonged bear market on its own. The executives said they needed to link with a large financial institution that had a stronger capital base.

The bank recently reported a third quarter net loss of \$488m or nearly \$3 a share.

The purchase of a US institution has always been a central part of the vision of Rolf Breuer, the Deutsche chief executive. His aim is to expand Deutsche's international operations in an attempt to nudge it into the ranks of the world's top investment houses.

Deutsche's operating profit shrank from DM1.28bn (\$760m) to DM70m in the three months to September 30.

Output of magnesium to be ended by Dow Chemical

Kenneth Gooding, Mining Correspondent

Dow Chemical said yesterday it was quitting magnesium production and would close its plant at Freeport, Texas. Last year the factory accounted for about 15 per cent of global output of the metal and nearly 40 per cent of US production.

Magnesium is the lightest structural material and is increasingly used to produce castings for applications where weight is critical. Demand from the automotive industry jumped by 23 per cent last year and was up another 16 per cent in the first half of this year.

Traders suggested there was a scramble by US customers to secure supplies after Dow's announcement, but there was no shortage. "Prices might move higher once the stock overhang is absorbed," said one.

Byron Clow, executive vice-president of the International Magnesium Association, said the closure would leave "a big hole" in the market until new capacity in Quebec and Australia came into operation early next decade. "But I'm sure the Chinese will rush to fill that hole."

Dow's decision to leave the business, after 57 years of producing magnesium at Freeport, was not a surprise. For the past two years it has been looking for a buyer for what it decided were non-core operations. The timing, however, was sudden. Dow said that lightning and storms in September that damaged the plant meant a sale was now out of the question.

The company will try to relocate about 300 contract workers who lose their jobs.

Global magnesium production last year was about 421,000 tonnes, according to Magnesium Monthly Review. Dow's plant had a 65,000 tonnes capacity but produced about 60,000 tonnes last year.

Roskill, the market analysis company, said the use of magnesium by the automotive industry could be expected to grow at an average of 14 per cent a year to reach 100,000 tonnes by 2000.

THE LEX COLUMN

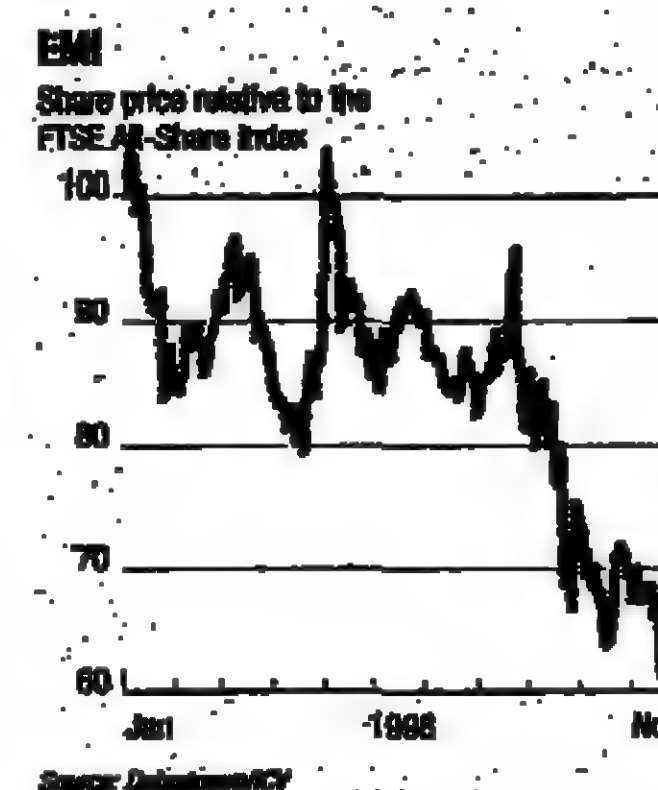
Complex Formula

Examining the twists and turns of the Formula One \$2bn bond issue hardly compares with the real thing - except for bankers. For them, there is one thing more thrilling than Mika Hakkinen. And that is whether the cash flows from the Formula One business will be big enough to support the interest and principal repayments on the bond.

Formula One's advisers have subjected the cash-flow models to extraordinary stresses. One scenario looks at what would happen if, among other things, the annual number of Grand Prix falls from 17 to 13 and television contracts accounting for 25 per cent of free-TV revenues default. There would still be enough cash.

So why is there still market nervousness? One issue is the European Commission's position. It is concerned about the length of certain exclusive TV contracts. But Formula One points out that, if it had to shorten the contracts, it thinks it would be able to renegotiate them on better terms. That is probably so. But for bondholders, the certainty of the cash flows is as important as anything. Then there is the issue of intellectual property rights to the sport is secure. The advisers have received legal advice to the effect that the Commission's competition authorities cannot challenge ownership of such rights. But it would be nice to hear the Commission saying so itself.

The oddest thing about the whole episode is why Formula One does not wait until the regulatory uncertainty is completely cleared up.



Share price relative to the FTSE 100 index

business is hardly attractive to new entrants. Given that EMI has not exactly flourished in the public eye lately, a management buy-in, perhaps by former PolyGram president Alain Lévy, would be a nice idea. But without a duplicated cost base to slash, justifying a chunky premium to EMI shareholders would be difficult. And with the bond market in its current state, financing would not be easy either.

Furthermore, despite its 30 per cent underperformance this year, an exit multiple of 14 or more times forecast 1999 operating profits does not look too tempting. With Tuesday's interim results likely to confirm the deterioration in EMI's trading since its September profit warning, this is not a bargain. A deal might just materialise, but EMI shareholders should not count on it.

Art

Champagne corks are popping in the art world. One of Van Gogh's last self-portraits has just sold for \$71m in New York - the second highest auction price ever for a Van Gogh and nearly twice what his "Sunflowers" fetched in 1987. Works by Picasso, Monet and Modigliani have also comfortably beaten their estimates this week. Worldwide art auction sales are expected to top last season's \$2.5bn, in itself the highest for a decade, according to Art Sales Index.

Is the art market overheating again? Its robustness in the face of global financial turmoil and slowing economic growth certainly appears remarkable. But it is also a little deceptive. Volumes are still well below the last peak in 1999-90, when auction sales reached \$4.6bn. And this week's sales by Sotheby's and Christie's contained some of the best

19th and 20th century paintings to come to auction for years, which whetted the appetite of dedicated collectors.

Moreover, a two-tier market has developed. While masterpieces are fetching record sums, dealers and auctioneers are reporting declining interest in routine works, even by great artists. Pieces by Cézanne, Bonnard and Braque failed to find buyers this week, while 10-15 per cent of the lots at two Christie's modern art auctions remained unsold. In many ways this is reassuring. If buyers - nowadays almost all American and European, rather than Asian - have turned more discerning, there is less chance of repeating the boom and bust cycle of 10 years ago.

Drugs

The headline is that some UK schizophrenics are being denied a "suicide stopping" drug. A typical story in which the cash-strapped National Health Service is reluctant to give patients better, but more expensive, drugs. But an independent study showing the effectiveness of clozapine raises a much more interesting question about UK health spending. These drugs (makers include Novartis and Zeneca) cost £2-4 (\$3-\$7) a day, about 20 times more than older varieties. But if they really cut suicide by 80 per cent, this saves on hospital treatment. A night in intensive care costs about £500.

The drugs industry needs this sort of evidence to thrive in slow-growing state-funded markets. To justify price/earnings ratios of 20-50 times, companies cannot rely on the fast-growing US market, where they are allowed to advertise. They must persuade public health providers to allocate more of their budgets to their products.

In the UK, a fragmented system has made it difficult to look at healthcare costs in the round. If, as in the case of schizophrenia, the costs are also spread over social services and police departments, proper cost-benefit analysis becomes even more fraught. The good news is that the government is looking not only at how to spread best practice through the NHS, but also at pooling budgets across branches of the care industry. While ministerial rhetoric may not sound friendly to drug companies, a more rational approach to healthcare spending would benefit the sector.

Viag dominant partner in merger with Alusuisse

By Frederick Stüdemann in Berlin

Viag, the German conglomerate, and Alusuisse, the Swiss industrial group, have completed terms for a "merger of equals", creating a company with annual sales of about DM50bn (\$30bn) and net earnings of DM1.5bn.

The deal is due to be completed before next summer, after tax details have been sorted out.

The merger - the latest in a wave of industrial restructuring in Germany - in which Viag will be the dominant partner, follows uncertainty over what form any deal would take after Alusuisse confirmed this week that the two were in talks about varying degrees of co-operation.

Financial markets had interpreted this as a sign that a takeover by Viag could be imminent, although neither group commented at this point.

As owners of the bigger part-

ner, Viag shareholders - who include the state of Bavaria, the Allianz insurance group and HypoVereinsbank - will hold the majority of shares in a new group with headquarters in Munich. That stake is expected to be at least 60 per cent.

Wilhelm Simson, Viag's recently-appointed chairman, will head the managerial board of the new company. Theodor Tschopp, head of administrative board at Alusuisse, will head the supervisory board. Sergio Marchionne, Alusuisse chief executive, will work as deputy to Mr Simson.

The difference in tax regimes between Germany and Switzerland - in particular the treatment of hidden reserves - is understood to be the main outstanding issue in the merger, in which the companies are using US generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), raising the prospect of a future listing on a US stock market.

The strategic objective is Mr Simson's vision of a company split roughly evenly between a "commodities" group, made up of Viag's core energy business and its fledgling telecommunications subsidiary, and an "industrial" group comprising chemicals, packaging and aluminium. Energy accounts for roughly 80 per cent of Viag's earnings.

The decision to opt for a "merger of equals" was due to Mr Simson's wish to avoid the acquisition and goodwill write-off costs of a takeover.

Investors responded positively to the news of a merger rather than a takeover. Viag's share price closed DM1 up yesterday at DM1.026.

Earlier this week the share price had fallen 14 per cent over three days following a report that the companies were in talks. Investors had feared Viag would be burdened with acquisition costs that would have cost it an estimated DM1.0bn to DM1.5bn.

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Markets Latest

FTSE 100	5,717.5	(+111.3)
Nikkei	10,230.00	(+251.1)
DAX	2,787.00	(+42.4)
Hang Seng	10,778.00	(+225.8)
ASX 200	1,118.37	(+64.3)
SE Asia	1,187.24	(+4.9)
US DOLLAR		
1 US dollar	0.95	(87)
1 US dollar (10)	118.91	(118.24)
US LUNTIME RATES		
3-month	4.375%	
6-month	4.475%	
12-month	4.575%	
Yield	4.575%	
US NORTH SEA OIL (WTI)		
West Texas	\$16.00	(16.54)
US GOLD		
New York Comex Gold	\$298.20	(298.12)
London	\$298.20	(298.12)

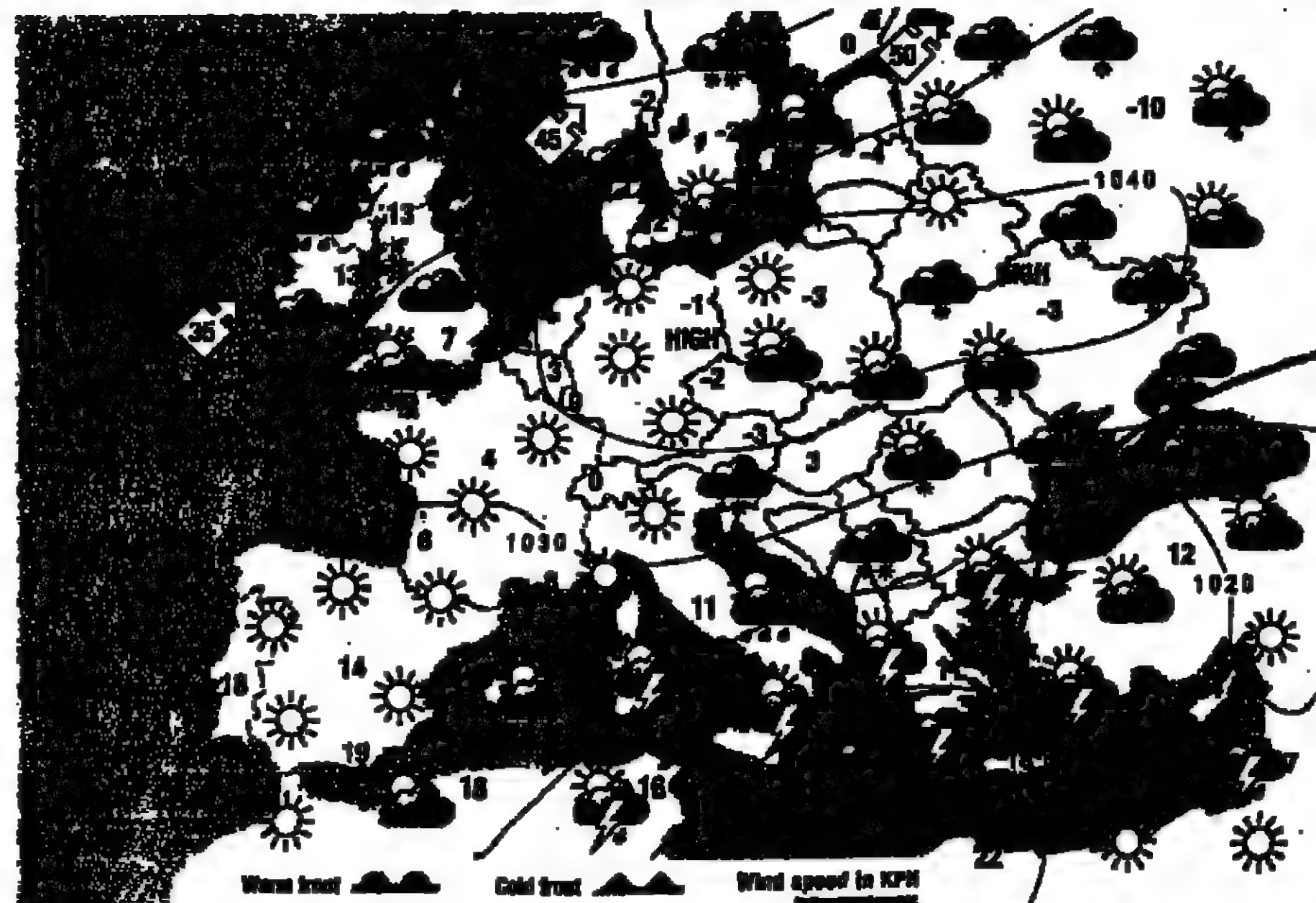
Weather

Europe today

An intense area of high pressure will continue to make much of northern and central Europe fine, cold and settled. There will be a severe overnight frost in many areas. Western Scandinavia will turn a little milder later in the day, with heavy rain moving east, preceded by snow. The Iberian peninsula will be dry with plenty of sunshine. Low pressure will keep the central Mediterranean unsettled with thundery rain.

Five-day forecast

Very cold conditions will continue across most of northern and central Europe during the next few days, but milder south-westerly winds should push warmer and more humid air towards eastern Europe by Tuesday. Greece will have extremely heavy rain and strong winds on Sunday and Monday as low pressure deepens.



TODAY'S TEMPERATURES

Location	Temp	Location	Temp	Location	Temp
Abu Dhabi	32	Beijing	10	London	10
Accra	32	Bombay	28	Madrid	10
Algiers	18	Buenos Aires	18	Moscow	10
Amman	18	Calcutta	28	Paris	10
Athens	18	Chengdu	10	Rome	10
Bahia	28	Delhi	28	Singapore	31
Bangkok	33	Dubai	28	Stockholm	10
		Hong Kong	28	Taipei	10
		Kobe	10	Tokyo	10
		Manila	28	Yokohama	10
		Shanghai	10		
		Singapore	31		
		Taipei	10		
		Tokyo	10		
		Yokohama	10		

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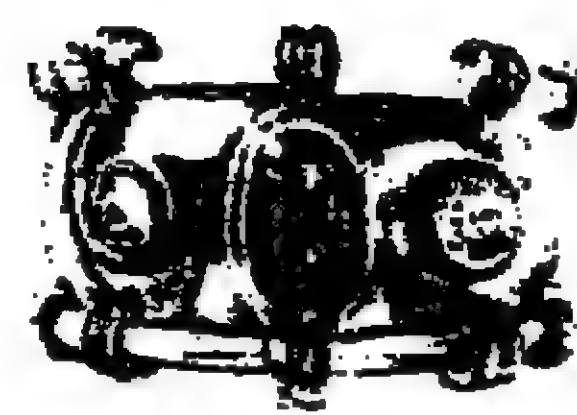
KETS
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Designs on power

'I remember filling T. E. Lawrence's motorbike tank with fuel the evening before he died'

Page XVII



Power of the purse

'Necks are bare, ears unadorned, only on a finger can the glint of a jewel still be seen'

Page XI



Horse power

'It was enough to make you catch your breath. Proud carriage, straight nose and tall, curved ears'

Page XXIV

Smart young men with a heroin habit are on the increase, writes Simon Buckby, and the City is just the place to earn the money to pay for it

Many times I've sat in meetings with my boss and a client, reached into my jacket for a pen and pulled out a needle by mistake," says Jarrett.

Aged 26, handsome, confident and articulate, he is typical of a growing breed with a well-paid job in the Square Mile and an addiction to heroin. Jarrett, needless to say, is not his real name.

Heroin was first patented as a medical alternative to morphine in November 1898, but was quickly made illegal because of its addictive power and terrible side-effects. Now it is losing its stigma; its image of unwashed junkies with dirty needles sleeping rough on the streets, such as those in the film *Trainspotting*, is shifting.

Rebanded, it is no longer just the scourge of the underclass, it is becoming the recreational drug of choice for a new "smackerati" of respectable professionals. Heroin is spreading out of the ghetto and into the City, where it is countered to the office.

Jarrett grew up in Hale Barnes in south Manchester, a wealthy suburb where Manchester United footballers own large mansions. He went to Manchester Grammar, a top-flight private school. "As at most schools these days, almost everyone took drugs, speed or acid," he told me. "When I was in the sixth form, E became the big thing."

Following in the footsteps of many gap-year students, he travelled in India and Nepal for a year and dabbled in the local drugs - cannabis and opiates mostly.

In 1991, he went to study cognitive psychology at the University of Westminster, where, like some other students, he occasionally took cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy. Unlike other students he also began taking heroin.

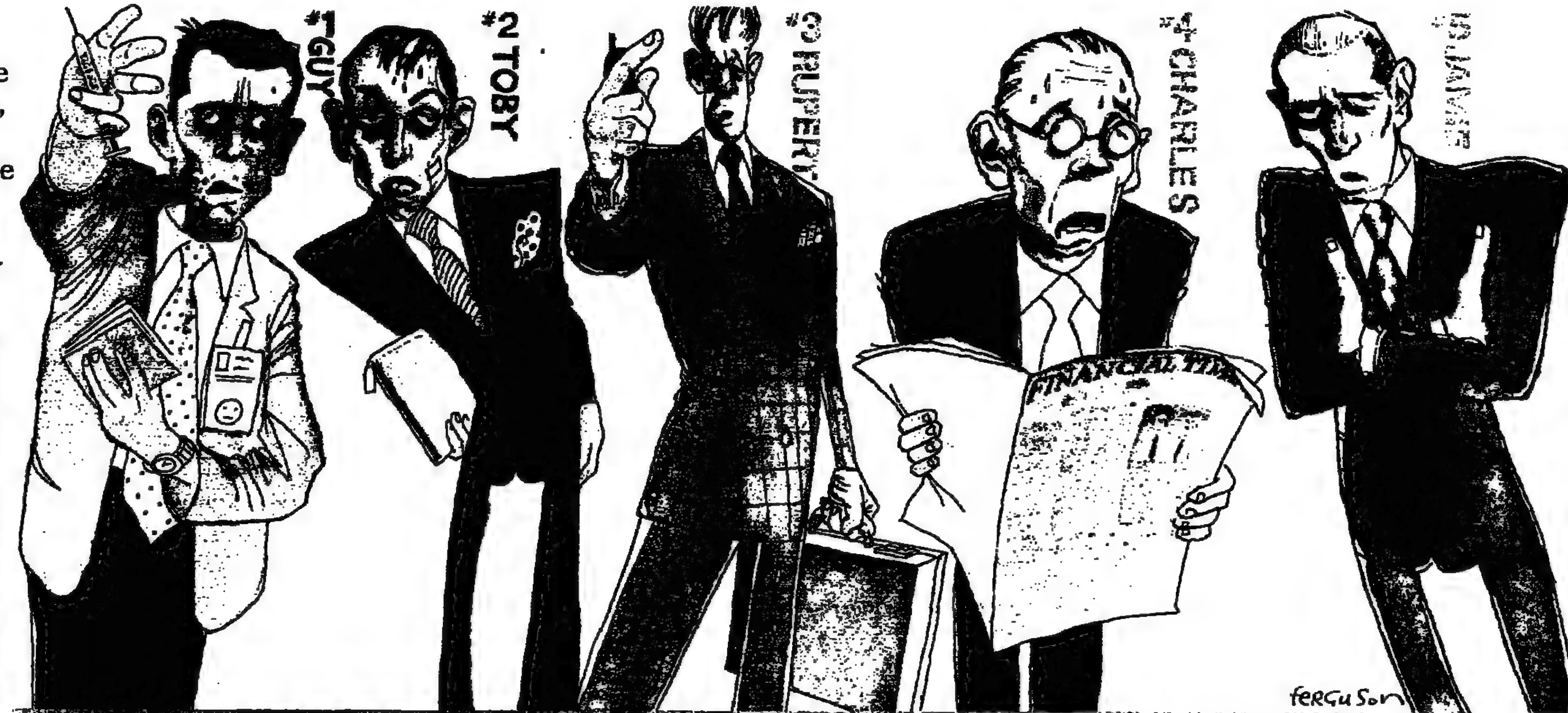
"I knew some schoolmates who had tried it," he said. "They'd just finished university and moved to London. They came round to my flat to watch TV and said they'd brought a bag of heroin with them. They asked if I fancied a go."

"I didn't think twice about it. I knew the risks. I remember the heroin screws you up. But I was keen to try it. My mates had been doing 'gear' most weekends and 'brown' was the one drug I hadn't done."

"Brown" and "gear" are 1980s slang for heroin. A 20th of a gramme comes in a small twist of plastic - a "bag" - and costs £10, although London dealers are currently selling it for just £2.

He started out smoking, or "chasing the dragon", which involves placing heroin on a sheet of tinfoil, heating from underneath and inhaling the fumes.

"It hits you within 10 seconds. You can feel the stress leaving your body and your muscles relaxing. You feel cocooned in ermine, with no



Smack

worries, away from the mundaneness of life. It's like in that first five seconds after you wake up in the morning.

"You can think as clearly as normal. You can hold down a conversation, though your speech is a bit slurred. Then, suddenly it's tomorrow and you think: Wow, what happened. You've slept it off."

"The first few times it makes you vomit. But by the time it makes you sick, it's already dispelled your ability to worry. So every junkie I know says it's the nicest vomit you ever have."

He showed me a huge black scar above his wrist, caused by accidentally resting his arm in an open fire. "I smelt it before I felt it. No, it's not that you can't feel. It's that you don't care about the pain." And there are scars on his fingers where he has not bothered to stub out cigarettes, so they have just burned into his skin.

Throughout his final year at university, he smoked heroin every weekend, even during his finals. "It didn't affect me," he said. "I still got a 2:1."

After university, Jarrett went travelling again, this time to central America, where he smoked heroin more or less every day. When he ran out of money, he returned to London.

In 1995, at the age of 22, he got a job. "I thought: what's the quickest way to make as much money as possible so I can spend it on having fun? I had a few mates who worked in the City. I didn't know anything about what they did but I knew they made lots of money."

"I got a job near Old Street Tube station, brokering corporate computer contracts for multinationals. We had an annual turnover of about £100m."

He started on a salary of £50,000, quickly rising to £85,000, and bought a big flat in Fulham. "I had the fastest

promotion in the history of the company. And all the time I was there I was on heroin."

By now he had been smoking heroin solidly for three years. "I started to feel a bit ill if I went a couple of days without. I could score gear where I lived, but I needed to make sure I could get some near where I worked."

"Through some beggars in the Tube station, I found a regular supply in a squat round the corner from my office. I started buying it from them almost every day, usually in my lunch break."

Four people lived at the squat in squalor. Drug dealers use people like that as a safe supply channel, passing drugs beyond the underworld to office workers.

The enjoyment from heroin was starting to wear off for Jarrett. The squatters were not smoking it, they injected it. He said: "I just decided to have a go, to get a bigger buzz. And injecting £5 worth was even better than the first time I'd smoked."

"You can smoke it every day for months and stop without any withdrawal symptoms. In fact, you have a honeymoon first year."

"Intravenous is different. Two months after shooting up every day you are really hooked. If I missed a day, I was really ill and my eyes were streaming. It takes a while to turn into your master, but it inevitably will."

"Every time I've been to the squat, I've seen four or five other guys in suits - usually different people - either just buying or actually shooting up."

"There is a network of City suits who use gear," he claims. "Most don't like scoring off the street, but some of us don't mind. I would guess there is a heroin addict, or at least someone who uses it occasionally, in every City firm with more than 500 staff."

He has a simple explanation for why heroin is being taken up by this new class of user. "I felt my life in the City was empty. I hated getting up in the morning. As a symbol, I deliberately used my push tie as a tourniquet. Others are under a lot of pressure in their jobs. Heroin is a way of forgetting about it all. Heroin is not a drug you do if you are happy."

"It's no coincidence that it used to be just the homeless and destitute who use heroin a lot. You feel like you don't care about anything and those people want to escape their lives."

But, he said, unlike the destitute, a well-paid user with a good source of clean heroin can live a fairly normal life for a long time.

"I earned £85,000 a year. I had a really nice flat. Untidy, sure, but I wasn't living like a tramp. All my meals were on expenses. Every penny went on heroin. I often didn't have enough to buy a razor."

He said he certainly was not the only addict in his office. "Junkies know each other and stick together. There were 14 people in my team at work and I immediately found one of them was doing heroin as well. Another couple tried it with me. And I knew others in the company who were smoking it in the toilets during the day."

"My boss knew I was on heroin. He didn't care as long as I was making money for the company."

long as I was making money for the company and didn't shoot up at my desk. But he saw my needle scars and asked me to cover my wrists and hands when we went to see clients."

For two years, Jarrett created a secret life, a sordid existence of desperate trips to find new sources of the drug he craved - a life that his family knew nothing about.

"I was caught in its clutches. It had become the main thing in my life. I spent every night with junkies and lost my social life. Heroin is the ultimate in submission and domination. There is nothing more selfish than heroin. It's like a lover, always there, all hard to know exactly how long. But after five days I was completely clean."

By now, even his friends who smoked heroin started to complain that he was "turning into trash". They decided to tell his parents.

"My parents collected me and took me to a clinic in Harrogate. It was a fast-opiate detox. I was put on sedatives for a few days, it's hard to know exactly how long. But after five days I was completely clean."

The clinic, run by Detox 5, part of the Cygnus Healthcare group, confirms the changing profile of heroin users. A representative said: "Just a few years ago we had virtually no professionals in here. There is definitely a growing trend."

But Jarrett did not stay away from heroin. "I was only clean for a few months. I got a new job in the City and picked up new suppliers. This time they actually came round to my office every day and dropped it off."

Despite his relapse, the clinic had put him on a road to recovery early last year. "After six months in the new job I'd had enough. I'd had enough of being ill all the time and having a crap life and I wanted to come off and start my life again. Making the decision to stop is purely personal and no one can make it for you or force your hand."

"I went back to my parents to get sorted out. For six days I went cold turkey unassisted. It was by far the worst time of my life. I had no sleep, no food, constant nightmare visions and total agony. It was a trip to the

depths of my mind. But I knew I'd be sorted in a week or so and I just had to focus on that."

"I also knew I had to be back in Manchester to do it. Away from the City, my job and my dealers. I am very lucky, I had a way out. I had good parents and money. On the streets, people have no choice but to carry on."

"I've been away for a year and I guarantee my old suppliers and mates from the street are either dead or in jail. A year on I feel vindicated: 1998 is the first year

in five years I have done no heroin at all. My emotions have reappeared. My sex drive is back."

"I have no regrets," he told me, as we sat in a pub in south Manchester, fashionable with Manchester United footballers. As his tale appeared to be coming to a happy ending, he made a chilling declaration.

"I don't want to get back to where I was before exactly, but I'll probably have another go - just to remind myself how good it is..."

My boss knew I was on heroin but didn't care as long as I was making money for the company."

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Joe Rogaly

Compassion by choice

'We judge our actions against selfish criteria. We are moral where it is cost-effective'

Page III

NEXT WEEK

A world away

The FT's top tips for stylish Christmas and New Year holidays

In FT Weekend

PERSPECTIVES

The Nature of Things

Sex aid for conception control

Sperm dyeing may let prospective parents sort the girls from the boys, writes Kate Bendall

When my mother went into labour with me, the midwife asked her whether she wanted a boy or a girl. "Well, I've got two little girls already," my mother replied. When I finally arrived, the midwife announced: "It's a lovely little girl - and you thought you wanted a boy." Fortunately for me, this response apparently summed up my mother's feelings very well.

Anecdotal methods for increasing the chances of conceiving a particular sex have existed for centuries, suggesting that some degree of preference is common among prospective parents. Aristotle believed the more heated the passion of the male partner during intercourse, the greater the chance of conceiving a male. Modern suggestions for conceiving a particular sex include adjusting the timing of intercourse relative to ovulation, altering the frequency of intercourse or changing the acidity of the vagina. None of these has been proven effective.

Scientists have for years tried to develop reliable techniques for "preconception gender selection". Now, a company in Virginia in the US is offering a method called MicroSort, which exploits the size difference between the X and Y chromosomes. A person's sex is determined at conception by the sperm's chromosome content: if a sperm containing an X chromosome succeeds in fertilising the egg, a girl is conceived, while fertilisation with a Y-bearing sperm results in a boy.

Because the Y chromosome is roughly one third the size of the X, sperm carrying an X chromosome have 2.5 per cent more DNA than those carrying a Y. In the MicroSort procedure, scientists label the DNA in a sperm sample with a dye that emits fluorescence in



ultraviolet light. Since X-bearing sperm contain more DNA, they fluoresce more brightly, and a machine can sort a sample into populations enriched for X- and Y-bearing sperm. Sorted sperm are used to achieve a pregnancy, either through IVF treatment, or by intra-uterine insemination, which is less invasive and easier to perform.

The method is far from perfect. The scientists are consistently able to enrich sperm populations for X-bearing sperm to 85 per cent and for Y-bearing sperm

to 65 per cent. Although these figures are substantially better than the 50-50 mixture of an untreated ejaculate, some couples undergoing the process will be disappointed in the sex of their child. The research continues, however, and the sorting process is likely to improve significantly.

So, in years to come, will couples be able to ensure they conceive a child of their preferred gender simply by strolling into a high street clinic and handing over a sperm sample?

Leaving aside the question

of how many couples would take such an opportunity if it were available, the new technology raises practical and ethical questions. There is a serious possibility that exposing human sperm cells to ultraviolet light and labelling their DNA with a fluorescent dye could increase the chances of harmful mutations. The scientists claim the method is safe: the dye is apparently non-toxic, binds DNA reversibly, and no mutations were found when a single gene was examined.

Most importantly, several

hundred births in agricultural animals and all 11 human offspring born from the MicroSort method have been healthy. However, since agricultural animals usually have a short lifespan, the long-term safety of the technique remains unvaluated.

The second important consideration is who might wish to use the technique. Few people would raise ethical objections to its medical application, which is to prevent the conception of boys with certain genetic disorders. About 350 diseases,

including haemophilia, Duchenne muscular dystrophy and some forms of hydrocephalus, are caused by mutations in genes on the X chromosome.

If a boy inherits an X chromosome carrying a faulty gene from his mother, he will suffer from the disease. In contrast, a girl inheriting the faulty gene has a second X chromosome from her father, and the chances are this will have a normal copy of the gene.

Consequently, in many of these diseases, such as hydrocephalus, girls with

one faulty gene show no disease symptoms. The use of MicroSort should enable women carrying certain faulty genes to bear only healthy daughters. However, the method has drawbacks.

First, in some of these diseases, female carriers with one faulty and one normal gene may suffer milder disease symptoms in later life. In Duchenne muscular dystrophy, for example, female carriers often begin to show signs of muscle weakness in their 20s and 30s - sadly, often when they are coming to terms with having a

severely handicapped son. A second disadvantage is that even where a female carrier suffers no symptoms, she will face the same dilemma as her parents if she wishes to have a family herself, and will have to undergo sperm sorting in order to avoid having an affected son. Given these difficulties, an alternative route of conventional IVF treatment will probably remain desirable for some couples. This allows individual embryos to be tested so only those not carrying a faulty gene are returned to the uterus.

The other main application would be for "family balancing": for example, parents who already have three sons might wish to ensure they conceive a daughter. The scientists justify this by claiming that MicroSort can increase human happiness. However, this is surely an area for ethical debate. Even the term - family balancing - with its implication that a family where the children are all of the same sex is in some way unbalanced and therefore less desirable, seems faintly repellent.

There might also be serious ramifications for the children themselves. An only daughter, conceived through such an expensive technological innovation, might not live up to high parental expectations. While she might feel especially "wanted" for being female, her brothers could feel less valued simply for being male.

Finally, in cultures where one sex is considered more desirable by a majority of couples, the availability of MicroSort could increase imbalances in the sex ratio in the general population. Choosing the sex of offspring will inevitably become a realistic option for many couples. We should be aware of the possible consequences. ■ Kate Bendall, Mammalian Genetics Unit, MRC Harwell, Didcot, Oxon OX11 0RD.

Minding Your Own Business

Setting rocks on a roll

The O'Grady brothers have built solid careers on fine stone, writes Grania Langdon-Down

Jo O'Grady, who runs a stone flooring company with his brother Richard, will be paying for his supplies in euros next year. In the summer, he contracted to buy enough euros to pay for 80 per cent of what the company, Stone Age, is planning to spend on stone in Europe next year. "It is looking quite good at the moment because sterling has weakened and interest rates have come down at last."

But he admits it is a gamble. "The economy is on the edge of an abyss. But I think people are fed up with being talked into a recession and I am more hopeful now that business will hold up than I was two months ago."

Tall and reserved in comparison with his altogether bouncier brother Richard, Jo has spent 10 years building up his expertise in stone. Stock consists of 70 stones in greys, beiges, browns, creams, greens and blacks from small European and African quarries for floors, walls, stairs, fire surrounds and vanity units. Stone Age mainly supplies architects but also attracts individual customers to the showrooms in Fulham, west London.

The cost of buying stone tiles for a 20ft by 20ft kitchen would be about £2,000. So far, orders are

holding steady at about £130,000 a month - a level reached during a surge of interest in stone that followed Labour's 1997 election victory. "Suddenly everyone was refurbishing their image," says Richard, joint director with Jo.

The company currently numbers six, including Jo's wife Sally who is company secretary. Their younger brother Roddy helps out part-time between acting jobs, while Richard's wife Alexandra helps with marketing and publicity. For Stone Age, growth has been steady since its first year turnover of £77,000 10 years ago to £1.36m during 1997/98. It rode the last recession supplying architects working at the top end of the commercial market.

Jo, now 40, started his career as a salesman but on reaching 30, decided it was time to set up his own business. He explains: "It was the late 1980s and everybody seemed to be going mad about terracotta tiles. I decided to concentrate on limestone and sandstone and find a thin stone tile in more muted colours which would look good indoors, whether in homes, shops or offices."

He turned a bedroom in his south London home into an office, had a cheap letterhead printed and wrote to more than

100 quarries and stone factories abroad. Twenty replied but only one produced the sort of stone he was looking for, a grey and beige stone called pietra lero. He visited the quarry and factory in Spain and Stone Age was launched.

"I borrowed £10,000, which I spent on advertising, buying a car and paying myself a salary," he says. He sent mailshots to architects and designers and in six months he had used up the loan. But then architect Eva Jitina ordered £32,000 worth of stone tiles for a Joseph fashion shop in Sloane Street, London.

At the end of his second year, Jo's older brother Richard, 42, who had been running his own furniture business, joined the company. By the end of 1989/90, Stone Age was supplying five different stones and turnover was up to £221,000, with net profits of £22,000. The following year turnover increased to £288,000 but net profits were down to £3,500 as overheads had gone up by £20,000 - the bulk going on advertising.

"We also paid ourselves a bit more," Richard says. After three years working from a bedroom, the two converted Jo's garage into an office, renting their first showroom in Fulham two years later. Last year they

bought the three-storey building for £120,000, putting £40,000 on themselves and taking a commercial mortgage on the rest. They have spent £80,000 refurbishing the ground-floor showroom and office and converting the upper floors into a flat which they hope will be used by Stone Age staff.

They are also renting a second showroom two doors away. Richard says: "Architects can decide on a particular stone from a piece of the size of your hand; private clients very rarely buy unless they can stand on it first."

During 1997/98, Stone Age saw a net profit of £37,000. Overheads also grew, with marketing now accounting for £100,000, and pay rises for the brothers.

The main target of the marketing was architects. "The more names we can drop, the more prestigious projects we can do, the more attention we can attract," says Richard. Their stone can now be found at Glyndebourne opera house, the Sackler Gallery extension at the Royal Academy in Piccadilly, London, designer Nicole Farhi's Bond Street shop, and at Habitat in London and Dublin.

The stone is kept in a warehouse in Chertsey, Surrey, where about £150,000 worth of stock is held. It is too much, Richard

explains. But building work often runs late, and the stone, which Stone Age has already paid for, cannot be invoiced to the client until it is delivered.

Jo goes on buying trips to foreign quarries about six times a year. He also checks on quality control which is "notoriously irregular" in Europe. Only 5 per cent of their stone is English.

The building trade is a perilous business, but by being very tough on payment the company has only had a few bad debts. The brothers are pretty jaded about builders - from the big companies to "Joe Bloggs working on his own. In 10 years of working with them there are only 5 per cent I would do repeat business with," says Richard.

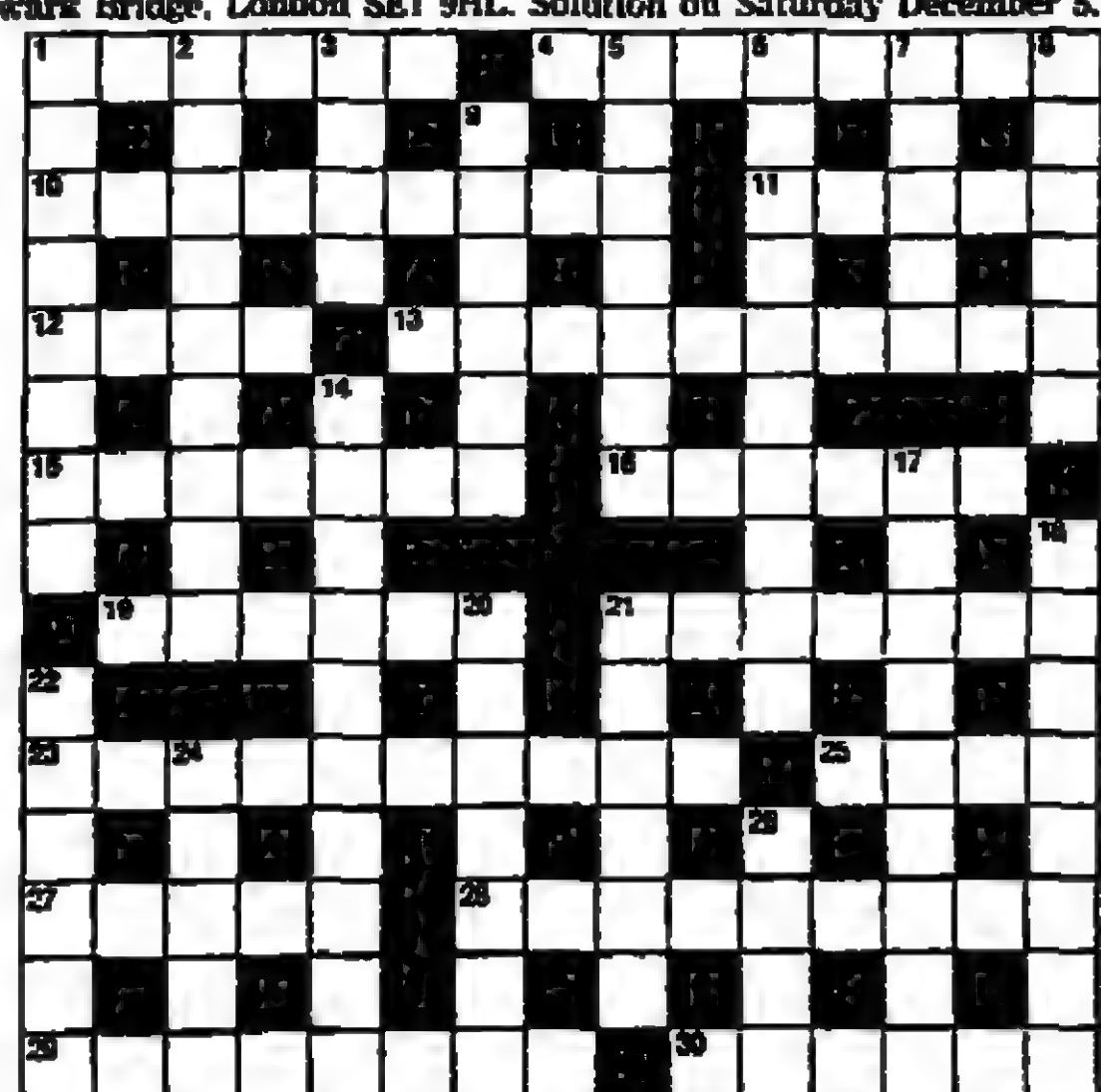
While the two brothers see their own projects through, Jo tends to concentrate on the financial and marketing side, while Richard enjoys the selling and pricing of jobs.



Stone Age mtr founder Jo O'Grady and brother Roddy

CROSSWORD

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BRIDGE

The Lederer Memorial Trophy features top national and international players. This year, the so-called "All Stars" team, consisting of Zia Mahmood, Andrew Robson, Gunnar Hallberg and Colin Stape, took the honours. Robson also scooped the Best Play award, perplexingly not as declarer, but for a wonderfully simple, yet ruthless piece of defence.

N
♠ J 8 5 3
♥ Q J
♦ A 7 6
♣ 10 8 5 4
W
♠ K 10 7
♥ K 8 6 5 2
♦ K 9 8 4
♣ -
E
♠ A Q 9 6 4
♥ A 10 8
♦ 5
♣ A J 6 3
S
♥ 7 4 3
♦ J 10 3 2
♠ K Q 9 7 2

Dealer: W Love: All

North East South West
- - - 1H
NB 1S NB 2D
NB 3C DBI NB
3S NB 4NT NB
5D NB 6S
East's 3C bid was Fourth Suit Forcing - making West describe his hand further. When West duly showed three card spade support,

East headed for slam, launching into a version of Blackwood, the response to which showed that West held either K4 or A4. Missing one or other of these, East settled for 6S.

Declarer best South's K4 with A4, and then played his 54 to dummy's K4 and North's A4. Sitting North, Andrew Robson paused to ponder his options. Every other North decided to play a club, hoping to promote one of their spades into a certain trump winner. However, Robson undertook something more defensible: should attempt he counted the declarer's likely tricks. There seemed no way East could make 12 tricks other than on a complete cross-ruff, scoring each of his and dummy's trumps separately. Robson's solution looks reckless: he led a small trump from his jack-four holding, vitaly crushing two trumps on the same trick, and leaving the declarer a trick short.

Although the contract might still be made, declarer sensibly attempted to establish diamonds, and failed - turning out to be the only declarer not to score his slam.

Paul Mendelson

CHESS

Nicholas Pert, of Oakham School, and Ruth Sheldon, of Manchester, have won the world under-18 boy and girl titles in Spain. Britain's best result in these competitive events which normally go to former Soviets.

Sheldon already plays for England's senior team but Pert seeded only No. 15. He achieved the IM title and a 2641 rating (elite grandmaster level) in an impressive unbeaten performance.

Both were helped by the new £10,000 Saitex Computers sponsorship which brought extra coaching and allowed England to field more players - though not in the youngest age groups where the BCF's current restrictive policy defies past evidence. Early high-class experience in fact creates champions.

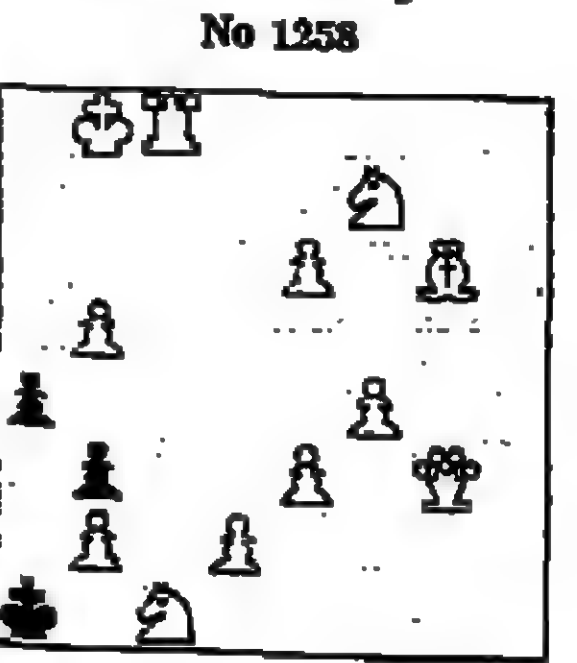
When Lloyds Bank 1992 invited nine boys and girls aged 8-14 to compete against GMs and IMs, some said they were "not ready". But five of these players, who included Pert and Sheldon, have since won world or European titles (R Sheldon v A Ramaswamy, India).

1 d4 Nf3 2 e4 g5 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d5 5 Bc2 0-0 6 Nf3 e5 7 d5 Naf 8 Bg5 Sheldon's favourite system, whose plan, which works well here,

is to use key light squares as a launchpad to attack the BK, h6 9 Bf4 g5

Better is Qc3 with the idea Nf7 and f5. 10 Bg3 Nxe4 11 Nxe4 f5 12 Nd2 White controls the light square e4... fxe4 13 Nxe4 Bf5 14 Bd3 g4 15 f3 gxf3 16 Qxf3 e5 17 0-0 cxd5 18 cxd5 Bh7 19 Qg4... and now g4. Black is already lost. Qc3 20 Exf6 Qxf6 21 Rf1 Qc7 22 Nf6+ Kh5 23 Nxf7 Nc5 24 Bf4 Qc7 25 Qg6 Nxd3 26 Nf6 Resigns.

No 1258



White mates in three moves, against any defence (by E Pradgnat). An annoying kind of problem where it is harder than it looks to smoke out the black king from his corner hideout. Solution, Back Page

Leonard Barden

PERSPECTIVES



Ethics Today

Stroke your cat, but poison your rat

We suit ourselves when deciding which animal to anthropomorphise, says Joe Rogaly

We are confused about the proper way to treat animals. We eat them, wear their skins, hunt some, pet others, sacrifice millions of specially-bred rodents in laboratories every year. Some meats are from penned-in beasts, machine-slaughtered after an unenviable, cramped existence. Others, especially fowl, perish in the wild. The latest victory for "animal rights" was announced as we prepared recently-shot pigeons for the pot. "Animal testing for cosmetics will no longer be allowed in Britain," said the radio this week. Escott's recipe, laid out beside the hob, spoke more eloquently. We browned the little bodies in butter, as demanded by the master chef. "No new licences for

experiments on live creatures will be issued," said the transitor box. "Good," we replied, as we added mushrooms softened in butter, shallots, a glass of wine, a dash of brandy. "About time." We laid hot bacon on the tiny breasts, poured the pan juices over the top. There is of course a difference between stewing pigeons slowly in veal stock and inflicting cruel laboratory experiments on captive mice or apes. The purpose is, however, common: to serve the convenience of ourselves, the dominant animals on the planet. True, we may aim to please our palates, which we applaud, or our admirers, which we deprecate. To the exploited species the result is the same. Death.

We must conclude that the only consistent animal liberationists are vegetarians, vegans, or Jains. The most ascetic of the latter wear face masks and sweep the road ahead, lest they inadvertently harm a living creature. This is an act of religious faith, fine for believers. The rest of us make up our morality as we go along. Factory farming? Free-range chickens taste better, but cost more. Scientific testing? Not for per- fumes, but without animal experiments we may not have had vaccines against cholera, diph- theria, smallpox, polio, tubercu- losis... Apparel? Yes to leather, no to fur. Clearly, we judge our actions against selfish criteria, such as price or the purpose of each sac- rifice. We are moral where it is cost-effective to be so, fastidious when we can afford the luxury of

self-approval. We also differen- tiate by creature. In Britain the hunted deer is known to feel stress, the fox is still fair game, and to poison a rat is our duty. We shrink from cock-fighting, bear-baiting, and, some of us, bull-fighting. We would go to some lengths to protect dogs, cats, monkeys, dolphins, elephants but take little thought for the manner in which the pigs we eat are fat- tened. Some of us enjoy rabbit pie; others creep in to milk farms at dead of night to release the inmates. This middle reflects our shift- ing perception of what we are. When we saw ourselves as uniquely possessed of souls, we could regard all other living creatures as devoid of spiritual essence, if not of consciousness.

There were two categories of being, us and them, humans and animals. Now that Darwinism has become the dominant philosophy of the intelligentsia of the west- ern world, we have returned to our place among the animals. subsumed humanity into the genetic stream that we are told flows through every species. We are one of Gail's life-forms, the most successful according to our own measures, but sharing DNA with them all. Thus adrift, we take refuge in our awareness of self, our ability to feel pity, the kindness within us. This leads us to wonder whether some animals are, like their masters, individually con- scious of their existence. Every- day experience suggests that they are. Anyone who has kept a

dog knows that it can recognise, become emotionally attached to, its human owner. I have seen a young elephant at bathtime play with its mahout, the one splashing the other with a bucket, the other returning fire with its trunk. In India they will grow old together, retire in mutual affec- tion. We have all read of studies of dolphin linguistics, chimpan- zee intelligence. It seems safest to assume such creatures have moved beyond instinct towards something like thought. The question is not where this places the higher animals, but where it places us. Free to shop around for objects of compas- sion, that's where. The other night I sat with knife and fork poised over a plateful of young red venison. "Do you realise

you're eating Bambi?" said the person on my right, smiling. We moved on to a discussion of the human casualties of Hurri- cane Mitch. There can be no question of equating the suffer- ings of women, men and children with those of, say laboratory specimens or animals used in transgenic experiments. We are moved by stricken people in a way that we can never be by wounded beasts. Yet where we remain indiffer- ent to the pain of the stag at bay, or the wired-up, sliced-down, injected, dissected rodent or higher primate, we diminish our own humanity. We are destined in torture, maim and kill other species. To keep us free of guilt we use our powerful brains to justify our actions. joe.rogaly.ft.com

Lunch with the FT

Plain water after cocktail of high adventure

Justin Marozzi finds Sir Wilfred Thesiger at odds with the technological present - and women

He stands behind the door like a lonely senti- nel, hawk-like eyes scanning the drive for my arrival. At 88, Sir Wilfred Thesiger, Britain's greatest living explorer - the man whose crossing of the Empty Quarter of Arabia by camel is so evocatively recounted in the sun-baked prose of *Arabian Sands* - is living in an elegant retirement home in the suburbs of Surrey. And he has just published another book. He steps out to greet me, impeccably clad in a three-piece grey check suit, check shirt, mustard, green and navy blue silk tie and black lace-ups from Lobb of St James's. Ever the Old Stonan gentleman-explorer. Once you have seen Thesiger's face, you do not forget it. Mined deep into owl-like sockets, cold azure eyes with black pinprick pupils stare out at you beneath a pair of forested eyebrows. Above an immense broken nose, built on a monumental scale, three gouged furrows rail- road across his forehead. Two more slant across his cheeks. Large leathery ears protrude from a head of care- fully brushed silver hair. If faces tell stories, his is an epic. Thesiger has booked us a table at one of his frequent lunching haunts, Woodcote Park Golf Club is of no merit from an aesthetic or a gas-

tronomic point of view but it has the undoubted advan- tage of being located only yards from his home. To the explorer's dismay, half a dozen chirpy women golfers occupy the next table, celebrating what appears to have been a suc- cessful 18 holes. "They're rather smug, Unbearable noise," he winces. One of this century's most prolific big game hunters (30 lions in two years), Thesiger appears more threatened by a bandful of women than he ever was facing a charging beast in Kenya or trekking 1,500 miles across the Empty Quarter after the war. Happily for my lunch guest, the women soon dis- appear. "Thank God for that!" he perks up, and adds, by way of explanation, "I'm more accustomed to the company of men." Before we get stuck into his wartime exploits with the SAS in the Western Des- ert, a waitress arrives to take our order. After ascer- taining what it is, Thesiger chooses chicken kiev with peas and potatoes. I decide on a starter of paté with toast, followed by fillet steak. This prompts another hasty perusal of the menu by Thesiger. The waitress suggests firmly that a starter might prove too much for the great man. He demurs but quickly reasserts control by instructing her not to bring too many potatoes. "You always swamp my

plate with them," he tells her reproachfully. I order a Bloody Mary. Thesiger, who does not drink, requests a glass of water. For as long as he can remember his life has been a cocktail of high adventure. As a six-year-old in Addis Ababa - where his father was British minister - he gazed in awe at the barbaric splendour of Ras Tafari's feudal army marching past the British legation to fight the forces of Negus Mikael. He presses my arm lightly as he tells me how, at the age of 23, he successfully led an expedition into the hos- tile country of the Danakil in search of the source of the unmapped Awash river in Abyssinia. Previous expedi- tions had met with disaster at the hands of the penis- and-testicle-chopping tribes- men. "The only thing that mat- tered to a Danakil man was how many men he had killed and castrated." It was little surprise, then, that during the Allied cam- paigns in North Africa Thesiger should gravitate towards David Stirling, founder of the SAS, for full-blooded action. "I said to him, 'I hear you're going to make a raid behind enemy lines. I speak Arabic and I know the desert.' Three days later we were 150 miles or so behind lines. I came upon a tent packed full with people.

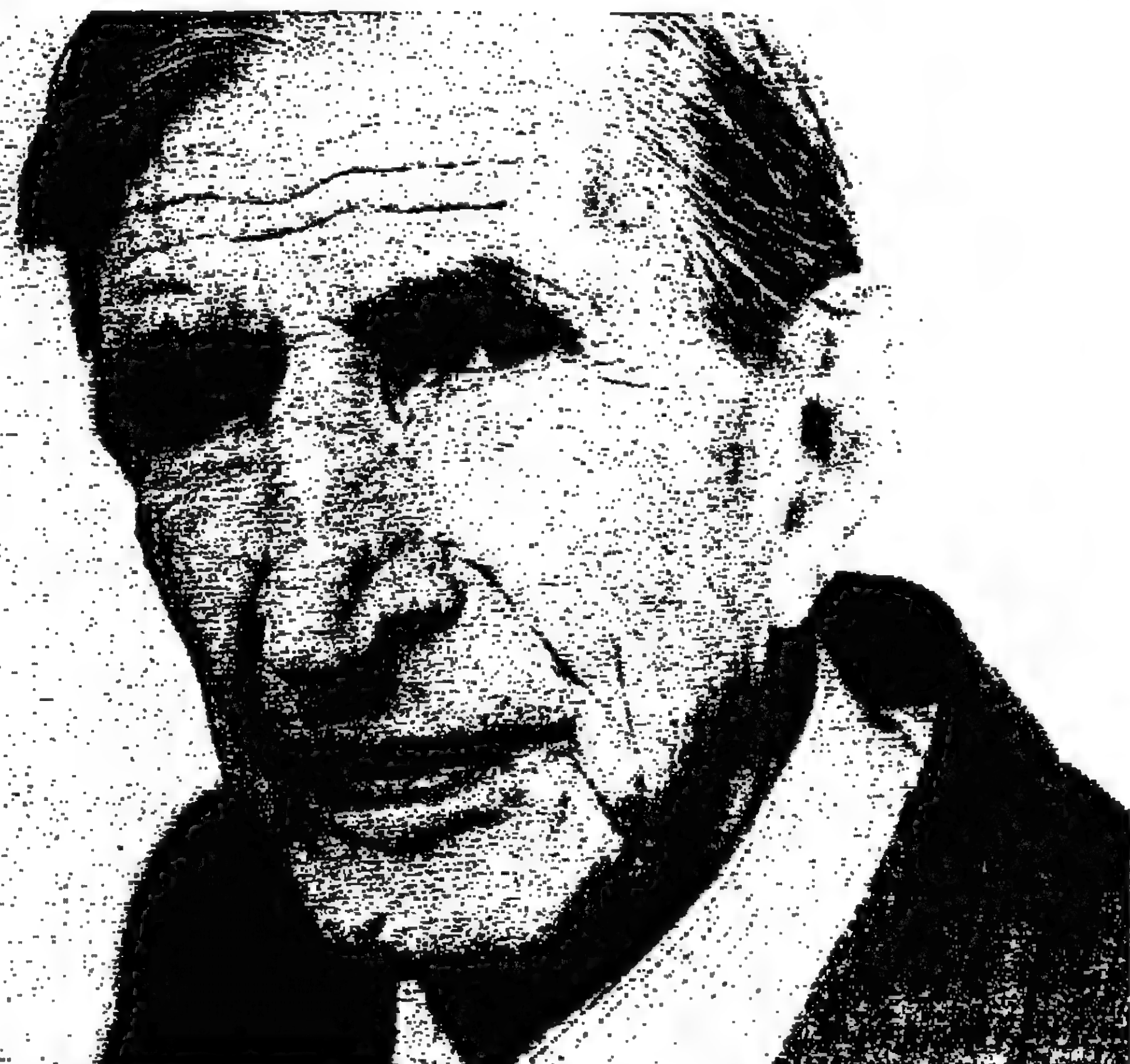
Luckily there was no one on guard. I just raked it with machine gun fire a couple of times. It felt rather like murder." His eyes glow. While we talk, we push our food about our plates, which saves having to eat too much of it. For pudding he asks for the strawberry and vanilla ice cream while I opt for the cherry crumble. He declines coffee, keen to return to his room to discuss his latest book. The elderly desert warrior and former Oxford boxing blue leans heavily on my arm for support as we return. His modest room is decorated with a few tokens culled from a huge, nomadic life - a walking stick made from a giraffe's shibbone, a photograph of Marrakesh, a tattered Oriental rug. On his bookshelves stand works by Kipling, Conrad, Buchan, Sassoon and, of course, his own.

He shows me a copy of *Among the Mountains: Travels through Asia*, which he says will be his last book. It is a collection of photo- graphs and diaries from his lesser-known travels in Afghanistan, Iraqi Kurdis- tan, Pakistan's North West Frontier province and Nuris- tan between 1950 and 1965. The photographs, grainy black-and-white mountain vistas and portraits of roughly hewn villagers, are vintage Thesiger. If he had ever needed to make a liv- ing, he could have been a professional photographer. But it was travelling, rather than books, which appealed. Had it not been for the savvy of a publisher and the persis- tence of his mother, the Thesiger prose would have eluded us for ever. "My mother had taken a flat on Tite Street (in Chel- sea), Graham Watson and Mark Longman from Long-

man's came round to see my photographs, 50 or 60 vol- umes of them. "They said 'It's ridiculous, you've got to write a book'. I said 'I'll be damned if I write a book. It's a complete waste of time. I want to travel'. The three of them went on and on and eventually I capitulated." It was as well he did. Four months holed up in a bedsit in Copenhagen broke the back of *Arabian Sands* which, with *The Marsh Arabs*, is still considered his finest work.

There is little sentimental about Thesiger. Until you get him talking about the havoc wrought on civilisa- tion by technology. "One hundred years ago the most powerful weapon we had was a machine gun. Then came the atom bomb and today we have chemical weapons," he growls. The motor car and aero- plane are also anathema, products of a gross mod- ernity that has made access- ible parts of the world previ- ously reserved only for more resourceful explorers.

Is there nothing, other than their unrelieved pessimism for our age? Isn't this all rather a gloomy assessment of the human lot? He smiles and the blue eyes twinkle. "Oh, I can be much gloom- ier than that." Courteously, he escorts me to the front door. My taxi arrives and he looks distaste- fully towards an elderly woman staring at a noisy TV game show, and sets off gingerly in the direction of his room. ■ *Among the Mountains: Travels through Asia*, by Wil- fred Thesiger. HarperCollins £24.99



Sir Wilfred Thesiger: 'The only thing that mattered to a Danakil man was how many men he had killed and castrated'

Jason Owen

Slaves to the truth

Presidential dalliances are nothing new. Jurek Martin reports on genetic evidence

It did not look as if an earthquake had struck Monticello. A light cold rain was falling, break- ing a long Indian summer, and the buses and cars that normally flood to the won- derful Palladian house that Thomas Jefferson built out- side Charlottesville, Vir- ginia, were down to a trickle. But Betty Goss knew the tectonic plates had shifted. "Y'all have prob'ly read or heard the news," she greeted visitors in her thick Virgin- ian accent. The young TV reporter from Channel Eight News in Richmond also had a job to do, even if Monticello was an unlikely backdrop. "Does this change your view of Jefferson?" he asked visitors insistently, microphone in hand. "Can you make com- parisons with Clinton?" What grabbed them both was new evidence in a nearly 200-year-old mystery. DNA genetic research on Jefferson's known descend- ants and on those of Sally Hemings, his black slave, all but conclusively prove that America's third and most cerebral president, author of the Declaration of Indepen- dence and ultimate Renais- sance man, was the father of her youngest son, Eston, born in 1808. To some, this was merely confirmation of the obvious.

The rumour of the first pres- idential sex scandal has been around since 1802 when James Callender wrote in the Richmond Recorder that "by this wench Sally, our president has had several children". Jefferson survived that, winning re-election in 1804, much as the current pres- ident, whose second name is Jefferson, was first elected in spite of a history of dalli- ances and who now seems unlikely to be forced out of office by one conducted in the White House. Of course, times and par- ticular circumstances were different. Sex between con- senting adults, even if adul- terous, hardly compares to the heinous crime of slavery - and Jefferson, though he agonised about slavery and the inherent qualities of Negroes, was also a Virginia gentleman who owned slaves, about 200 of them. More than that, his wife Martha Jefferson had died in 1782, entreusting her husband not to marry again. And Sally Hemings, who joined Jefferson in Paris in 1786 when aged 14, as his daugh- ter's companion, was Mar- tha's half-sister - product of the same father and light- skinned, with something of Martha's appearance and character, according to con- temporary accounts.

Any pop psychologist could write a book about the temptations of the lonely widower. Recent talk shows wondered how long the sexual relationship lasted - whether it was freely given. DNA cannot answer these questions, though it did sug- gest that her oldest son was not a Jefferson progeny. But the precise nature of the relationship between the slave owner and chattel had continued to divide Ameri- can historians until a couple of weeks ago. Joseph Ellis, whose biography *Jefferson, An American Sphinx*, was published only last year to widespread praise, had dismissed the cir- cumstantial evidence linking the two in bed. But he has now been converted by DNA. Ordinary Americans are taught to revere their Found- ing Fathers. But, even in a pantheon that includes Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt, Jefferson always

enjoyed a special place not merely for his contributions to the establishment of democracy but also for his civility and the extraordi- nary range of his complex intellect. President John Kennedy once entertained a group of Nobel Laureates and told them that the White House had never before played host to a gathering of such intel- lectual force - except, he added, when Thomas Jef- ferson was dining alone. Monticello, built and re- built as its owner became ever more immersed in architectural perfection, is the supreme manifestation of the man. It was, as Orlando Patter- son of Harvard wrote this week, "considered incon- ceivable that a man of Jef- ferson's character could do such a thing" as sleep with a black slave, even though it was commonplace for plan- tation owners to engage in miscegeny. Now, as a black Patterson finds himself "less alien- ated" from Jefferson: "He is part of the family, a family with a ghostly contradictory past, to be sure, but family nonetheless." Other scholars venting views were less charitable. Annette Gordon-Reed, whose own book had posited an intimate relationship, wrote

of a conspiracy of silence among historians unwilling, as many Americans still are, to come to terms "with black-white sexuality, particu- larly in the case of a Found- ing Father". Much evidence had been suppressed, she wrote, because the Hemings family, being black, was considered "an unfit and possibly unre- liable contributor to our understanding of the past". More bluntly, she told Wil- liam Safire in the New York Times that, had the truth been accepted, "I don't think he would have been on Mount Rushmore or on the nickel". Safire himself, playing the modern political game from a conservative standpoint, found conspiracy of another kind. His recent column, deliciously headlined *Sally- gate*, saw it all as a plot by lefty historians to save Clin- ton, whose epitaph was "we are all Federalists: we are all sinners: so let's forget this impeachment stuff". Thomas Jefferson may or may not be turning in his grave under the obelisk at Monticello. But William Jef- ferson Clinton, at least, has surely been sleeping better since America, through its vote in the mid-term elec- tions, saw no reason to remove him from office for not being a plaster saint.

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PERSPECTIVES

Loyal keeper of the Kennedy flame

Arthur Schlesinger has defended JFK's reputation at no little cost to his own, writes Michael Steinberger

November 22 is the anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination, but Arthur Schlesinger Jr does not give over his day to prayers, toasts, or moments of quiet reflection. Schlesinger looks to other milestones, less drenched in grief, to dwell on the life of the president he served and revered.

"I think about Dallas, but I prefer to celebrate his birthday," says the 81-year-old historian, sounding wistful.

It is somehow fitting that Schlesinger would choose not to mark the date on which Kennedy died, for in the 35 years since that grim afternoon, he has laboured harder than anyone to keep alive the "Camelot" mystique, or myth.

Through waves of revisionist assaults on the Kennedy legacy, he has remained loyal, answering each charge, challenging every allegation, using every platform at his disposal to return the spotlight to the late president's vast but unfulfilled promise, rather than his promiscuity.

In just the past month, he has taken his case from the stately columns of *The New York Review of Books* to the glossy pages of *Cigar Aficionado*. No outlet is too off-beat or off-topical.

The calendar rekindles memories of Dallas, and Camelot, at a time when another presidency, famously inspired by Kennedy's, is imperilled over the kind of shenanigans that were routinely swept under the rug three decades ago. But it isn't only a year of scandal in Washington, it is also a season of betrayal.

Bill Clinton withheld the truth about *La Femme Lewinsky* from his closest aides, and several of his former lieutenants are today among his harshest critics. Set against this numbing spectacle, Schlesinger's fealty seems quaint, a throwback to a more dignified era when sex was considered a private matter and the help didn't talk.

Not that his devotion has earned him much praise; quite the opposite in fact. As tales of presidential philandering and palace intrigues yield a more complex portrait of Kennedy, Schlesinger's airbrushed recollections have brought him ridicule.

He has been denounced as a "servant", a "trained poodle", and one of America's "more purchasable intellectuals".

While still a towering figure in liberal circles and an influential voice - he recently testified before Congress regarding the Clinton impeachment proceedings - his battle to protect Kennedy's reputation has plainly diminished his own. In many quarters, he is seen more as a courtier than a scholar, as much a shrewd manipulator of history as a subtle interpreter of it.

What prompted Schlesinger, of all people, to pick up the Camelot torch and why, so long after the tragic finale, does he continue to carry it? His unending vigil is one of the more curious postscripts to the Kennedy saga.

Schlesinger certainly was not beholden to Kennedy. By the time the junior senator from Massachusetts was elected president in 1960, Schlesinger was already one of the nation's best-known historians, teaching at its most celebrated university, Harvard.

Although he didn't hold a doctorate, what he lacked in diplomas he made up for in lineage: his mother was a descendant of George Bancroft, a leading 19th century historian; his father was an eminent Harvard historian; ditto his brother-in-law, John King Fairbank, the doyen of American sinologists.

Schlesinger made his mark early: he was only 28 when his second book, *The Age of Jackson*, won a Pulitzer Prize. He then embarked on what was intended to be his magnum opus, a multi-volume retrospective on Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

He had just completed the third book, *The Politics of Upheaval*, when Kennedy summoned him to Washington. He put aside the project and never resumed it.

Schlesinger did not wear his convictions lightly and few Kennedyites embraced the giddy spirit of the New Frontier with more passion. He was soon known around town as "the tenth Kennedy", but what exactly he contributed to the task at hand is an open question.

His only steady assignment was to liaise with other liberals (he also moonlighted as a film critic for *Show Magazine*; the president, jokingly, often introduced him as such).

Beyond that, Schlesinger pitched in wherever help was



Arthur Schlesinger (left) ago has not wearied him in his campaign to stop the years condemning John Kennedy

needed. By some accounts, he was merely an ornament, a deep thinker brought on board to burnish Kennedy's image as a philosopher-king.

In a 1964 interview, Robert Kennedy said of his brother: "He liked Arthur Schlesinger, but he thought he was a little bit of a nut sometimes. He thought he was sort of a gadfly, and that he was having a helluva good time in Washington. He didn't do a helluva lot but he was good to have around..." Others have claimed, however, that Schlesinger was no innocent bystander.

Like moths to the flame, intellectuals have always been drawn to power, and critics believe the Kennedy White House, with its energy and glamour, had a particularly curious effect.

In his book *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, historian Gary Wills contends that Schlesinger and other academics gleefully sold their souls in order to gain Kennedy's ear and back in his glow. Wills specifically accuses Schlesinger of conspiring with the Kennedy family, before and after Dallas, to suppress books and articles unflattering to the president, a charge he denies.

Controversy also surrounds his role in the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco, arguably Kennedy's biggest mistake. Schlesinger opposed plans to invade Castro's Cuba, but that didn't stop him becoming something akin to a minister of disinformation.

"When lies must be told, they should be told by subordinate officials," he wrote in a memo before the attack.

Schlesinger admits he misled journalists to keep the scheme quiet, but does not regret his part in the affair. Nor does he feel he compromised his integrity, or violated some unspoken scholarly oath, by serving as a hired gun: "As an historian, how could you resist the opportunity to be on hand while history was being

made? I would have flunked an obligation to my profession had I turned it down."

After the assassination in 1964, Schlesinger returned to academia, teaching at the City University of New York until his retirement five years ago.

He had no trouble reclaiming his perch among scholars and wrote a number of well-received studies, including *The Imperial Presidency* (1973) and *The Cycles of American History* (1986).

Although clearly associated with a brand of liberalism that was all but routed out of existence during the Reagan ascendancy, Schlesinger has always been militantly mainstream. He locked horns with Marxists in the 1950s, did not budge when the Democratic party careened to the left in the 1970s, and now, in the 1990s, inveighs against the excesses of multiculturalism.

"He is the great liberal Democratic intellectual of our time," says Princeton University historian Sean Wilentz.

And yet, for more than a quarter-century, Kennedy hagiography has shared top billing with Schlesinger's other pursuits - and has, in many respects, eclipsed them.

One month after Dallas, he published a tribute to the 36th president, a worshipful eulogy he has since repeated, in brief essays and weighty tomes, dozens of times: "No one had such vitality of personality... He was life-affirming, life-enhancing. When he entered the room, the temperature changed; and he quickened the sensibilities of everyone around him... He was a man born to the exercise of power... His presence pervaded Washington, and he infused the laborious and opaque machinery of government with a sense of his own standards, his own imagination, and his own high purpose."

Schlesinger's 1965 book, *A Thousand Days*, a slightly less gushing, if no less adulatory, account of Camelot, for which he was awarded a second Pulitzer, remains the centrepiece of his effort to win Kennedy a generous verdict from history.

He has not relied solely on his pen to sway opinions. In 1966, reviving a survey first commissioned by his father, he asked a group of fellow historians to rate US presidents. But with a panel composed almost entirely of left-of-centre academics, along with a pair of liberal non-historians, Democrat politicians - Mario Cuomo and Paul Simon, he was accused of stacking the deck to ensure that Kennedy was deemed to be above average - which is precisely how the poll judged him.

Schlesinger is not an uncritical biographer. He grudgingly acknowledges that Kennedy, at least behind closed doors, was no saint.

Yet even while conceding some of the damning details, he has never wavered in his assessment: Kennedy blundered early and often but was a splendid work in progress, destined for greatness, at the time of his death.

Moreover, Schlesinger has always been quick to provide an exonerating footnote or a tantalising hint at what might have been.

Of the sexcapades, he says only that they "didn't interfere with the conduct of business". Likewise, he insists Kennedy was essentially duped into going ahead with the Bay of Pigs invasion by his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, under whom the plan was devised.

Most provocatively, Schlesinger suggests Kennedy would never have dispatched US ground forces to Vietnam and was inclined to withdraw from the conflict altogether.

This is a dubious claim, given that Kennedy, with his "bear any burden" rhetoric, was very much a creature of the Cold War and that it was mostly his appointees who later plunged the US into the quagmire.

Lyndon Johnson once griped that the Kennedys would "write history as they want it written, as they can buy it written". But if Schlesinger feels used, he isn't saying so. Seated in his cluttered Manhattan office - surprisingly devoid of Kennedy memorabilia - he describes his tour of duty in Camelot as "the most exhilarating experience of my life".

Time has not dulled his affection for Kennedy, and, apart from the grey hair, nor has it changed his appearance; he still favours the horn-rimmed glasses, bow-ties and rumpled suits of his White House days, when he more resembled a chaperon for the boyish chief executive than a Sharpe.

He is currently at work on his memoirs, due out next year, but don't look for much in the way of introspection. Schlesinger allows that it may be nostalgia which keeps him rhapsodising about those heady days long after other Kennedy acolytes, far more indebted to the late president - Ted Sorensen, Pierre Salinger, his "Irish Mafia" cronies - have moved on, but has little interest in exploring the idea.

He offers a simpler explanation: "If you had a friend and things were written about him which you believed were false, you would rise to his defence. That's all I'm doing."

What Schlesinger dubs "the National Enquirer school of revisionism" - epitomised, in his view, by Seymour Hersh's recent bombshell, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, depicting Kennedy as a depraved lothario who bedded Mafia molls and rattled sabres with reckless abandon - has hardly dented Kennedy's standing with the US people. A poll last year ranked him second only to Franklin Roosevelt among 20th century presidents.

To Schlesinger, it is Kennedy's achievements - defusing the Cuban missile crisis, negotiating a nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union, advancing the civil rights agenda, establishing the Peace Corps - and the idealism he embodied, that are the source of his enduring popularity.

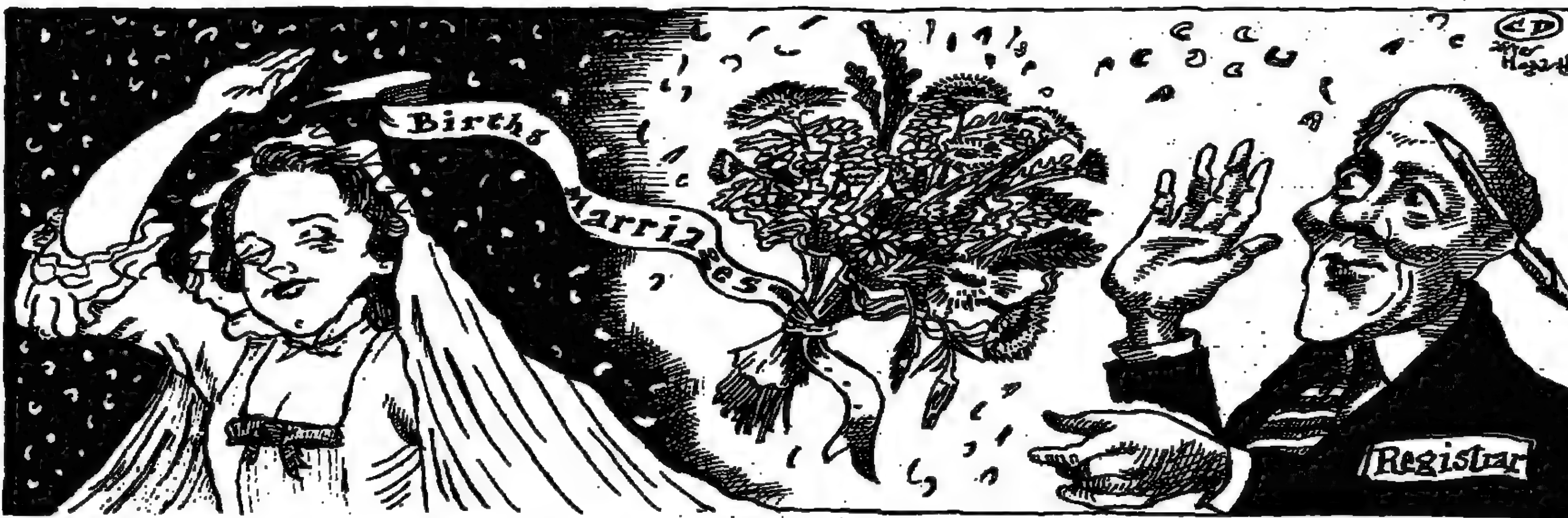
But he agrees that martyrdom has also coloured perceptions, placing Kennedy beyond the reach of those determined to demonise him. "There is the central drama of this magnetic figure whose life is cut short," he says. "It has a mythic quality."

Correctly or not, the assassination, which left Kennedy etched in youth, is seen as the end of American innocence, opening the floodgates to the social unrest of the late 1960s and the cynicism that envelops politics today.

Thirty-five years on, it is clear the country will never completely get over the loss. Schlesinger surely hasn't.

A very secular practice

How shall I wed thee? Christian Tyler counts the ways



that of the priest. Some registrars fear it will come even more uncomfortably close if proposals in the government's green paper on the family are implemented.

Barely 40 per cent of the 280,000 marriages in England and Wales each year are now solemnised in church; and a growing number of couples take advantage of a relaxation in the 1994 Marriage Act to have their civil ceremony in an historic house, a sports club, or a famous ship such as HMS Victory or the SS Great Britain.

English law, unlike Australian or American, specifies fixed buildings, so flower meadows, gazebos, hot-air balloons and diving bells are not permitted.

With freedom has come variety, and competition. Some registrars publish glossy brochures,

offer alternative kinds of "service" and encourage couples to add their own words to the minimal formulae required by law.

Most couples are content to take guidance provided that the ceremony is thoroughly "traditional". When demands are exotic, it is up to the registrar to exercise discretion. So the pair of bikers married recently in Somerset were allowed to bring in their motorcyle.

"It was a very attractive motorbike," says Valerie Gillman, the Taunton registrar who performed the marriage. "A Yamaha, I think."

Prayers and religious music are strictly forbidden in civil ceremonies. (Handel's *Queen of Sheba* is deemed secular. Gibran's words not sufficiently so.)

That does not stop couples try-

ing to smuggle things in. A junior registrar in London recalls hearing at various times a so-called "adaptation" of a Jewish prayer, a passage from St Paul's epistle to the Corinthians which nobody recognised, and an invocation in Gujarati for which no translation was forthcoming.

Freedom of choice has also meant competition, not only between the civil and the religious, but between the registrar offices themselves. For the 1994 act also permitted couples to choose which part of the country to get married in. This has led to what the trade - and the green paper - call "enhancement".

"People are able to vote with their feet now, so we have worked quite hard on enhancing marriages here," says Alison Cathcart, superintendent regis-

trar at Westminster, one of the most progressive in the country. "We respond to the customers. After all, it's their wedding."

"It's not just a legal contract," she explains. "People wish to make a formal statement to their friends, to the public, and they wish to do it in nice surroundings. It's all about choice. Why not, if it encourages people to get married?" And encourage is exactly what Tony Blair's government, not without some embarrassment, is trying to do.

That a government should dare to voice its support for the institution of marriage in an age of myriad "lifestyles" has delighted the man whose influence has been detected all through the document.

Jack Dominian is a Greek-Armenian Roman Catholic con-

sultant psychiatrist, specialising in marital and sexual problems, recently retired from the Central Middlesex Hospital. "This is one of the best things that has happened to marriage and the family for a very long time in this country," he says.

The state had been compelled to take an interest in marriage, he adds, because the costs to society of marital failure are so great: promiscuity and teenage pregnancy, alcoholism and drug addiction, delinquency and crime, even the health of the divorced.

The financial incentives to marry remain niggardly, and the green paper proposals are modest enough. All registrars would be encouraged to "enhance" their ceremonies, which will not please all of them. The "quickie"

licence, costing £30, would be abolished, and couples would have 15 days in which to change their minds. Registrars would have the legal power to call for documentary proof of identity and freedom to marry - a needed deterrent to bogus marriages contracted for immigration reasons.

Britain, unlike continental countries, has no identity card, and a London night club dancer in one such racket was exposed recently; she had married seven times in 14 months, for £2,500 a time.

More controversially, there is talk of premarital counselling. Some registrars feel this is a flawed idea. "Most people in city areas come to us because they don't want to go to church and hear moralising from the minister," says Mark Rimmer, superintendent registrar at Brent in north London. "So they don't want it from us either."

If, as suggested, the process is to be voluntary, then the couples who most needed it probably would not ask for it, he says. Other registrars believe they will be asked only to give out the names of professional counsellors.

But the registrar's sacerdotal remit may be extended further. The idea of "baby-naming ceremonies", or secular christenings, has been picked up and promoted in order to "help parents make a public, long-term commitment to their children".

Asked for her reaction, Alison Cathcart at Westminster (who happens to be Mark Rimmer's wife), says: "I don't have a problem with that personally, but there may be other registrars who do." She describes the idea as "a bit chichi", and is not convinced it is any of the government's business.

Births, marriages and deaths. No one, however, has yet had the temerity to suggest that registrars should conduct funerals.

Here comes the bride, all in cream, walking down the aisle on the arm of her father and a gaggle of bridesmaids in her wake. From invisible speakers issues the well-worn sound of Handel's music for the arrival of the Queen of Sheba.

The bride joins her groom before the dais. The celebrant welcomes the congregation, adding a few words about the meaning of the ceremony which is about to take place.

"Marriage is a fluid relationship that assumes many different forms throughout the years..." she says. "If you are growing individuals and if you can communicate this growth, your marriage will remain vital and creative."

A reading follows. The couple considered taking something from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*, or Shakespeare's sonnet 116: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds/ Admit impediments. Love is not love/ Which alters when it alteration finds..."

"They have settled for Elizabeth Barrett Browning's ode: 'How do I love Thee? Let me count the ways.' A member of the family gives a little address and the ceremony winds up. It has taken nearly 45 minutes.

We are not in church, not even in a registrar office, but in a hotel room decked out for matrimony and licensed by the local authority.

This is marriage *à la mode* in modern England, a very different thing from the scene portrayed by William Hogarth in his famous series, but one whose secular spirit he would certainly recognise.

The job of registrar, created in 1837, is a legal one and strictly secular. But the public's newfound freedom of choice - watchword of the age - means that it is coming to seem ever closer to

1551 من الاله

Meditations on a thinker

Critics of Isaiah Berlin would find he really did keep faith with his beliefs, suggests A.C. Grayling

It is easy to miss the point of Isaiah Berlin if you think either that a man's political and moral outlook should accord with an identifiable party platform, or that intellectual achievement is measurable only in bulky monographs. The appearance of something ambiguous, reticent, even uncommitted, in Berlin's thought and public life has misled his critics into thinking he presents an easy target.

But they indeed miss the point: for as Michael Ignatieff's memoir of Berlin proves, in both Berlin's life and work there is deep consistency and grand achievement. Berlin was a subtly perceptive historian of ideas, and because he devoted so much attention to understanding the sources of the ideas which have shaped modern times - often in unprecedentedly cruel and destructive ways - he was also a significant contributor to contemporary debates in social and political theory. His chosen vehicle was the essay, rich with the distillations of a wide and deeply pondered reading, and perfect as the vehicle for his undogmatic, exploratory style of inquiry.

Ignatieff has provided a mem-

oir and a meditation rather than a biography, in the sense that it focuses almost exclusively on the external events of Berlin's life and - mainly - work. But Ignatieff gives full attention to the evolution of the latter. He is alert to the critics who thought (and still think) that Berlin's achievement was slight, his reputation a product not of intellectual depth but of the part-lucky, part-assiduously cultivated personal connections that brought him into contact with most of the century's leading figures.

But Ignatieff shows that the celebrity Berlin accumulated from early in his adult life was based on the merited perception of his sound judgment and unusual intellectual emphases, formed by the complicated interstices of his Russian and Jewish origins and his English education.

Isaiah Berlin was born in Riga, Latvia, in 1909, of Jewish parents. The family later moved to St

Petersburg, and lived through the 1917 revolutions. By 1921, the Berlins had settled in England, where Isaiah went first to St Paul's School and then Oxford. He was elected a Fellow of All Souls in 1932, and taught philosophy at New College.

Apart from a posting in the British embassy in Washington during the war, and a brief posting to the Moscow embassy immediately after, he made his home permanently in Oxford; but he maintained his connections with the US, visiting there regularly to lecture.

One of his great achievements was the founding of Wolfson College in Oxford, serving as its first president. Ignatieff fleshes this skeleton, talking discursively about Berlin's friendships, his travels, his late discovery of love, and his anxieties about his intellectual contribution; and all the while tracing the evolution of his thought.

As Ignatieff shows, three inter-

ests dominated Berlin's work. One is the history of Russian thought; another is the criticism of the Enlightenment project mounted by its opponents; the third is the question of liberal values in a pluralistic society.

Berlin pursued the first two interests through studies of individual thinkers: Alexander Her-

ISAIAH BERLIN
by Michael Ignatieff
Chico & Windsor £20, 338 pages

zen among the Russians, and Vico, Fichte, Hamann and Herder among the Enlightenment's enemies. He pursued the third interest in its own terms - witness especially his celebrated *Four Essays on Liberty* - but it is pervasively present in his writings on these other topics also.

Berlin held that liberal society, by its nature, encompasses a plurality of mutually irreconcilable and conflicting values. Most lib-

erals believe that, by tolerance and the exercise of reason, conflicts of values can be resolved and harmony achieved. This is a legacy of Enlightenment attitudes; but these attitudes were premised on the belief that there is a single set of facts about human nature from which values can be derived.

The Romantics came to think differently, seeing liberty as the achievement of individual self-creation and self-expression. They, therefore, repudiated the Enlightenment's monolithic conception of human nature - not least because of the terrible implication that some of its inheritors drew, namely, that human nature thus conceived can be improved, despite itself, by those who know best.

Berlin's view is complex. He recognised the worthy aspiration in the Enlightenment belief that, by the use of reason, mankind can identify worthwhile goals for itself, and the means to achieving

them. He applauded its belief that science and rationality can overcome superstition, despotism, inequality and war.

But this faith was opposed by critics who argued that different peoples have different needs and aims, and that there are no universal standards of reason and therefore no ultimate solutions for the dilemmas faced by humanity.

Berlin recognised the force of this latter view, too, and indeed accepted a version of it. He was therefore committed to what seems the precarious view that a liberal society is only one form of human possibility, with no special status as against others - but to which, nevertheless, we should commit ourselves. But if liberal society is merely one among a plurality of options, why should we do so?

Ignatieff does not disguise this tension in Berlin's position, which is never resolved; but he rightly emphasises what is funda-

mentally worthwhile in it, namely, Berlin's insistence that although by its nature pluralistic societies are doomed to internal conflicts, it remains worthwhile quietly to push the claims of tolerance as a way at least of managing them.

Even if the critics of Enlightenment are right; even if there is an unresolvable conflict of competing values; even if there is no clear answer to how a given dilemma should be resolved; still, says Berlin, tolerance and reason can help to maintain the equilibrium which is, as he put it, the "first requirement of a decent society".

If anyone thinks that Berlin's politics - and especially his sense of Jewishness and his Zionism - were equivocal, they will learn from Ignatieff why he thought and acted as he did, and see that he kept faith throughout with his own liberal principles. Ignatieff's portrait is of a thinker who quietly and persistently tried to suggest a way for people to live with one another despite their occupancy of history's most terrible century.

His endeavour was, accordingly, a brave and valuable one, and Ignatieff does him justice.

Beware the arrogance of power

Can the Tories recover?
Malcolm Rutherford finds there is a case for them

The Conservative party has had a good run for its money for much of this century. Several times - in 1905 and 1945, for example - it has seemed down and out, but it has always come back. One of its biggest reverses was in the general election last year, so the question is what happens in the next century? Can the Conservatives recover again?

Two books, published more or less simultaneously, survey the party's history. By coincidence, they use the same phrase. John Ramsden, who has become the successor to Lord Blake as a near official historian of the party, actually calls

AN APPETITE FOR POWER: A HISTORY OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY SINCE 1830
by John Ramsden
HarperCollins £24.99, 562 pages

THE TORIES: CONSERVATIVES AND THE NATION STATE 1922-1997
by Alan Clark
Weidenfeld & Nicolson £20, 493 pages

his book *An Appetite for Power*. Alan Clark, best known for his *Diaries*, is more of a military historian and sometimes a practising Tory MP (he declined to stand again in 1992, but came back as the Member for Kensington and Chelsea in 1997), uses the same words in his preface: "The motivation of the Conservative party at all times and in both corporate and the individual context is their appetite for power."

There is perhaps one other similarity. Both authors note that the party tends to go into decline when it becomes overconfident. It neglects the grass roots and the basic organisation. Ramsden records that in 1982, after the Tories had been in office for over a decade, party membership had just about halved in the same period. Comparable declines set in under Margaret Thatcher, and then John Major. It may be that it is the arrogance of power, rather than the appetite for it, that should be emphasised.

Otherwise the books could scarcely be more different. Clark, who writes well though not always in sentences, has produced a lament for a lost age: hence the sub-title "Conservatives and the Nation State". He thinks it

was the duty of the Conservative party to preserve the empire and stay out of European wars. Even after the second world war had begun, he believes that Britain should have stopped and made peace with Germany. "For Hitler, Britain had become an irrelevance," Germany could have had eastern Europe while the British Empire was preserved.

Clark's heroes are Neville Chamberlain, because keeping out of Europe was essentially his policy; and Lord Home, largely because he was a decent sort of fellow. He dislikes the US because he thinks it conned Britain out of cash and credit during the war. As an imperialist, he admired the British recapture of the Falkland Islands in 1982; yet as a military historian it is surprising that he does not admit the exercise would not have been possible without American logistical support.

All that is quixotic stuff, though the last part of the book about recent Tory leadership struggles suggests that another volume of diaries is on the way. Clark does not get on to William Hague.

Ramsden also has a relatively simple thesis. He argues that because the party has been defeated and recovered before, it is bound to recover again. It is mainly a question of organisation and catching the tide. After all, many people had written off the Labour party, but it rethought its agenda and came back. The same should happen to the Tories, just as it always has.

Having started by claiming that the Conservatives may be fairly considered the most successful political party in the history of the world to date, Ramsden concludes: "The final point that emerges from a study of the party's history and its leadership is its ability to deliver the unexpected." Well, the unexpected could include failure.

Two flaws in both books. One is that it is a mistake to write history in terms of a single political party. Life and events go on, despite a change of government; so does the civil service, which neither author seems much to admire. The other is a confusion between Conservatism with a small or a large "c". Thatcher at the height of her power was hardly a conservative with either.

Where Ramsden, at the end, briefly acknowledges a truth, is in the importance of the *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the time. Catch that, and you may catch everything. Tony Blair is a conservative now. Unlike Baroness Thatcher, however, he should not make the mistake of staying too long. The hardest thing in politics is deciding when to go. The decision is nearly always wrong, on which point Clark and Ramsden happily agree.



Home is where a creature's heart is, no matter how human-friendly the landscape: swans and geese on Snettisham Marsh, Norfolk.

Robert Harding Picture Library

Dissent in the Garden of Eden

Nature is more than whatever poets, dons and supermarket managers say it is, insists Colin Tudge

How can you seriously get to grips with the issues of town and country without discussing the creatures, apart from Homo Sapiens, that actually live there? You can't; and this book therefore doesn't. The 28 essays do not include a single practising biologist.

Anthony O'Hear, for example, is an excellent philosopher but when he assures us with obvious relish that "for every polluted river (there are) many acres of reclaimed marshland", I find myself reaching for my revolver. Personally, I love wetlands - the stillness, the melancholy - although I can attest that mangroves, tropical salt-marshes, are among the least human-friendly of all landscapes.

What they do for me (or John Clare or John Constable or even Chief Running Bear) is not the point. What matters is that for thousands of non-human creatures the wetlands are home, from clams and large copper butterflies to storks and waders; but they are also among the most threatened of the world's much-beleaguered habitats.

To respect the lives of other creatures is not necessarily "anti-human", as O'Hear suggests; the ideal world contains happy humans and other creatures too, and is achievable. I have no wish to attack O'Hear in particular; but the self-satisfied, anthropocentric, donnish, but in the end insouciant and ill-directed, drift of this book got to me. It illustrates rather than illuminates why town and country, humans and non-humans, are at odds.

The editors, Anthony Barnett and the fox-hunting Roger Scruton, set the tone in their introduction. Very properly, they attack the simplistic nostalgia and the contradictions in much

"environmentalism" - "You cannot fight against beef on the bone... and hope for the small producers to stay in business. You cannot fight against agribusiness while subsidising food production" - and so on. They should have attacked the Luddism too, for we cannot now hope to conserve what is left of the natural world without good science. But the ostensibly hard-headed philosophy that Barnett and Scruton offer instead is even more deeply flawed. For, they say: "The countryside needs to be seen as an artefact: it is not intrinsically natural, organic, or authentic in the sense of being more real or less 'made' than the urban environment."

TOWN AND COUNTRY
edited by Anthony Barnett and Roger Scruton
Cape £17.99pb, 288 pages

Ah, but it is. To be sure, the word "natural" can be rendered meaningless, as O'Hear shows by quoting Aristotle, who may be seen to have argued that everything that is the case is *ipso facto* "natural", from the mushroom to the oily car park. But (and this is the central conceit of all science, and why scientists are necessary) there is a real world out there with an existence separate from ourselves.

Britain is not just a figment of human imagination, clay to be moulded at will. It is an empirical fact. It had, and to some extent still has, a flora and a fauna independent of human intervention: creatures that have taken 4bn years to evolve and somehow survived the ice ages and continental drift and which, collectively, are nature, if nature has meaning at all.

We know - or at least,

biologists do - what those creatures are, or would be if humans had left them alone. Pine martens, wild cats, otters and golden eagles are among the skin-of-the-beak survivors and once were common where now there are great cities. Rabbits and pheasants are among the interlopers, brought in for sport. It is all very clever and artful to suggest that nature is simply what poets and supermarket managers choose to say it is, but it just isn't true; or at least, it is true only in an extreme, postmodernist, anthropocentric sense that seems effete to the point of blasphemy.

Of course, as O'Hear points out, nature is always changing: species go extinct. But again, there are discoverable norms. Andy Dobson, then at Imperial College, calculated that present extinction rates are at least a hundred times greater than has been usual since the dinosaurs died out. It is not fair to blame the victims for their failure to adapt. Black rhinos are dying out in Africa because they are shot. What creature has ever adapted to bullets?

Of course, many fine vistas are artifice - but it's a matter of degree. Capability Brown's landscapes are "man-made" yet, as Joseph Addison commented, Brown was "honouring nature". In truth, his landscapes need a little less open space to be truly wildlife-friendly, but they were more natural than the lawns and topiary that William of Orange had favoured a few decades earlier.

The central issue, indeed, is not just to do with town versus country, or don versus woolly-but, but with the relationship between humans and what religious people would call, with a metaphor that is wonderfully resonant even if you reject the idea of God, the rest of Creation. That is where this discussion should start: how can we make a

world that is good for us, human beings, and good for them - other, non-human beings?

"Good", of course, is a big word; but it implies, at the very least, survival (which for other creatures means conservation) and the freedom to live according to one's own aspiration (which for animals is commonly translated as welfare).

We should begin by asking what we want and what other creatures want, and then ask what compromise is possible, and - beyond

that - how human and non-human might benefit one from another. We cannot know precisely what other creatures want, but there are intelligent insights: from botanists, scholars of animal behaviour and ecologists.

Start from there, and everything else starts to fall into place. Scruton's beloved fox-hunting, for instance, stands condemned not for killjoy reasons, but because it is cruel, like bullfighting and bear-baiting, and fosters an unhelpful relationship between people and animals.

If we begin, on the other hand, with the clever-clever observation that landscape meant different things to different people and therefore that anything goes, we will never forge a coherent philosophy and there will no hope for any of us.

Town and Country does contain some good and useful essays, such as Tony Curzon-Price on the tragedy of the commons and George Monbiot on, *inter alia*, the importance of ramblers (quite so!). But, on the whole, I hate it.

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BOOKS

Sting like a bee and succeed

Patti Waldmeir on the career of an American hero, Muhammad Ali

America has plenty of self-made men. Muhammad Ali is more than that: he is a self-made myth.

Out of a potentially lethal mixture of arrogance, bombast and "lip", Cassius Clay of Louisville, Kentucky, forged Muhammad Ali, world boxing champion, American icon and global hero. Ali set out to create, in his own words, "a new kind of black man". In the process, he shaped an entire generation's worth of American history.

David Remnick has written the story of Ali's life to read like a novel, but also like a potted history of politics and race in the 1960s. Remnick (formerly a Washington Post sportswriter and now editor of the New Yorker) has used his reporting skills to discover new material. But others have been there before him. For the most part, he relies on old facts, but uses them in a new way to tell the Ali creation myth in all its perverse complexity.

Remnick structures the book as a grand morality tale of rivalry between the three black champions of the 1960s - the deferential Floyd Patterson, the sullen, ex-convict Sonny Liston, and the defiant Ali - all three political symbols of different kinds of black men. But the Ali creation tale is always his focus; and it starts early.

By the age of six months, Baby Clay was well on the way to creating himself a boxer (while still an infant, he put out his mother's front tooth while stretching in her arms). By age 12, he was already hooked on narcissistic self-promotion; after narrowly winning his first fight, he declared himself "the greatest of all time". This phrase would become his mantra: "I'm the greatest! I'm the greatest!" he would cry, in the naive belief that speaking the words would make it so.

For naive, read shrewd: Muhammad Ali was a braggart not just by nature but by design, and in the end it was his mouth which made him champion. In a fascinating dissection of his strategy, Remnick highlights the way Ali used lip to defeat the quieter champions who preceded him. "Where do you think I'd be next week if I didn't know how to shout and holler and make the public take notice?" the boxer asked in 1962.

For those who lived through the Clay-Ali metamorphosis, his refrain about greatness has the "sweet familiarity" of a 1960s pop tune, according to Remnick. But at the time, there was nothing "sweet" about it to his boxing opponents, to the

**KING OF THE WORLD:
MUHAMMAD ALI
AND THE RISE OF AN
AMERICAN HERO**
by David Remnick
Random House \$25, 336 pages

his critics and performing a celebratory poem he wrote himself to mark the event.

But as a young camp follower on the night (my sportswriter father was covering the event), what I remember most was not Clay's beauty, nor even his victory, but the intensity of white animosity towards him. White America thought Clay was - if you will pardon the expression - an "uppity Negro". And it was not just his style which enraged it, it was also his politics: Clay had become a black Moslem, and a fervent disciple of Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam leader.

To white America, the black Moslems - with their doctrine of black pride and racial separatism - were no more than black racists. At a time when many whites had fallen hard for Martin Luther King's dream of a colourblind nation, the Nation of Islam abjured King's philosophy of non-racism and reviled whites as "blue-eyed devils". Eventually, the boxer would cast off his "slave name" of Clay and take the Moslem name Muhammad Ali, divorce his beloved wife for failing to dress with Moslem modesty, and refuse to fight in the Vietnam war on religious grounds.

In the end, of course, white America came to love the champion, for his skill, his natural wit and peculiar gentleness, and finally for his courageous fight against Parkinson's disease. For Ali created not just a boxing champion but a beloved national hero. This myth will run and run.

The novelist Susan Hill is finding new ways of engaging with the world while maintaining a long slow withdrawal from it.

Now in her mid-50s, she lives, as one of her daughters complains, in the "middle of a field" - that is to say, in a remote farmhouse in the Gloucestershire countryside. She gives the impression she would be pleased never to have to leave it. "I don't have a social life," she said. "I don't like it. I would love never to have to go to London again. I read fewer and fewer newspapers, and then only the racing and business pages. Soon I won't read any."

It is odd, then, that Hill has never been busier with worldly matters. This month, she launches a literary magazine called Books and Company. While next month will see the publication by Chatto & Windus of her latest novel, *The Service of Clouds*, as well as the second anniversary of the publishing company she founded, Long Barn Books.

The origin of her publishing venture lies in her lifelong admiration for Virginia Woolf and the Hogarth Press, which that author and her husband, Leonard, founded and managed. But the proximate cause that brought it into being was a quartet of short stories which Hill unexpectedly wrote in 1996.

"I thought I'd finished with short stories, and then all at once I wrote four in a row. They were too few to make a conventionally commercial book, and so I put them away in a drawer. But they nagged at me. I'd always wanted to have my own publishing company and I thought, well, if I start with my own work and these stories, I'd have my name to trade on."

Hill is determinedly self-sufficient - with even a hint of strain in her moral muscularity. When launching Long Barn Books, she refused to take out any bank loans or apply for grants. "I wouldn't borrow a penny. And why should public subsidy be spent on what I like to do?" she asked. "It would be unethical."

Creating a surplus value attracts her undivided attention. "Money is fascinating - what it can do - who's got it, and who hasn't." She is proud that her company made a £42,000 profit last year. One of her hits was a book on the late Diana, Princess of Wales, *The Day I Met Diana*, which earned £25,000 for a landmine charity, the Mines Advisory Group.

Hill's editorial policy is to please herself. In effect, it is simply whatever she decides to commission. No more than six titles a year are produced. The novelist yielding to the businesswoman, she avoids fiction on the bleakly practical grounds that it does not sell.

Books and Company is an extension of her publishing enterprise,

With many thanks to Virginia Woolf

Anthony Everitt meets the reclusive Susan Hill, who has launched a literary magazine and is publishing a new novel



Susan Hill: "Money is fascinating - what it can do - who's got it, and who hasn't"

although she does not expect it to be so much of a money-maker. She aims for £5,000 annual profit after two years, which will enable her to improve the fees she pays authors. Once again, her literary heroine

prompted her from the sidelines: Hill came across a reference in Woolf's diaries, which she appears to consult regularly for guidance, to someone starting up a literary magazine. "They all want to," she

remarked of her acquaintance. "So why shouldn't I have a go too?" The magazine will steer clear of academic literary criticism, and will not compete with the review pages of broadsheet newspapers

and news magazines such as the New Statesman and Society and The Spectator. There are to be no gossip columns, general arts coverage or personality pages.

"It will be a journal about the sharing of enthusiasm," Hill said. "The target audience will be those who go to literary festivals or take part in readers' circles, who read, buy and borrow books. They want background information and recommendations. Just as one buys What PC to know which computer to buy, I hope people who want to know which books to buy will turn to Books and Company."

The first issue is expected to be comfortably middle-brow, but with the occasional sharp edge. Joanne Winterson will write on the benefits of reading and, recruited from the other end of the fiction spectrum, Joanna Trollope will mount a defence of the historical novel. Alain de Botton will contribute a regular column. Stephen Fry will choose a knapsack of books for a Trans-Siberian journey and Ronald Blythe will be celebrating the work of the poet, George Mackay Brown. For the second issue, Hill has netted P.D. James and Fay Weldon.

It is surprising that Hill, who lives with her husband, Stanley Wells, the Shakespearean scholar, and her second daughter (the first being grown up), has any time to spare from family life and publishing for the business of writing. "There is an awful lot of hours in the day," she said. "And writers can't write all the time. Anyway, I can't. And I have loads of energy."

She is nervous of saying what her latest novel, *The Service of Clouds*, is about. "In fact, I don't really know myself," she said. "Isn't that ridiculous? I'm not even sure where it came from. If you see what I mean. It wasn't triggered by an obsession or a childhood memory. It just grew quietly in my head."

However, when pressed, she reveals some of the plot: "It's a story of growing up, of learning to fit in, of breaking away from home. It concerns obsessive parental love - and its opposite. The central character is a woman who lives through and for her son's life."

It doesn't sound as if she shares much of her creator's fierce realism and independence of mind. These are the qualities that have enabled Hill to negotiate her remarkable concordat with the modern age. She has found a way of living off it, without the inconvenience of having to live in it.

Books and Company is available by subscription only and can be ordered from Longmoor Farmhouse, Ebrington GL55 6NW. POC 01386-593443. E-mail: hill@booksandcompany.co.uk

A hideous humanitarian

This is an ugly, dim book about an ugly but brilliant man.

Arthur Koestler was one of the greatest political novelists of the century. His anti-totalitarian novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940), along with George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and 1984, did more than any other to turn a generation of intellectuals and ordinary people away from communism during the first two decades of the cold war.

A few years after it was published, in his harrowing *Arrival and Departure* (1943), Koestler made the world sit up and look with new eyes again, with one of the earliest depictions of the Nazi mass murder of Jews in Poland. "Is that rigorous of Koestler's intended as fact or fiction?" asked Osbert Sitwell in *Encounter*, comparing the book to lies published to blacken the German image in 1914.

Time and again Koestler the European intellectual,

his political instincts formed and finely tuned by his experiences of war and revolution in Hungary, Russia, Germany and Spain, was the conduit by which insular Britain was introduced to scenes of global horror and tyranny. But if he seemed destined to play Cassandra, the prophet never at first believed, he embraced the role of pugnacious adversary with aplomb, and sustained it with devastating consistency in every aspect of his private life.

He was vain, arrogant, violent, a drunkard, probably a rapist, certainly a petty tyrant to his three wives, the last of whom was persuaded to join him in a suicide pact when he was an old man dying of cancer and Parkinson's disease, and she was young and healthy.

Any biographer has to address this central paradox in Koestler's life: how could

a man so passionately devoted to humanitarian causes, so tireless in exposing world suffering, have been at the same time a domestic monster, blue-beard in a 20th century castle luring women from Michael Foot's wife Jill Craigie - whom he allegedly raped - to Elizabeth Jane Howard

**ARTHUR KOESTLER:
THE HOMELESS
MIND**
by David Cesarani
Henderson £25, 646 pages

and Simone de Beauvoir, into abusive relationships?

There are many ways into this dilemma. Was Koestler brutalised by his early experiences of war and oppression as a Jewish child in Hungary, where he grew up in the first years of this century? Did his loss of political faith, first in Zionism

and then in communism, turn him into a nihilist with no moral values? Was his status as guru of the left in 1940s and 1950s England a licence to torment on a personal level or did he, as his fellow Hungarian George Mikes suggested, simply import into western Europe the "central European" attitude that "every woman was regarded as fair game"? These are questions which touch on the vital issues of Koestler's life - his rootlessness as the inspiration for his political vision, the existential crises which made him so much a man of the times in the 1950s, his role in mid-century British intellectual life.

David Cesarani, however, ignores them all in favour of a shallow, tabloid debunking job which catalogues every personal peccadillo, every drunken outburst and cross morning-after note,

while paying scant attention to the literary and political achievements which are Koestler's claim on our interest in the first place.

Cesarani's twin flaws are an inability to focus and an over-enthusiastic zeal to judge. Koestler had a rich, colourful life which was deeply serious in its central phase - his conversion to and from communism during the Pink Decade, his travels through Russia in the 1930s and his incarceration and death-sentence in Franco's Spain in 1940 - but faintly ridiculous in its long denouement, when the elderly Koestler was a quixotic philanderer obsessed with the paranormal.

This last interest lost him intellectual respectability at a time when his novels were becoming less relevant, to a large degree because the message they preached had so completely triumphed.

The urgency and horror with which they burst on the world in the 1940s, and Koestler's virtuosity, in this refugee decade, in writing the first three in three different languages - *The Gladiators* (1939) in Hungarian, *Darkness at Noon* in German and *Arrival and Departure* in English - is hard to imagine today.

Cesarani dwells far too long on the elderly Koestler, and plods through the radical, flamboyant years in elephantine prose. Serious allegations, principally of rape, lose momentum by being jumbled up in moralising waffle about one-night stands and drink. Of the subject of this life, no personality at all, except a tabloid editor's bogeyman, steps off the page, while hanging over the whole enterprise is that British suspicion of the intellectual against which Koestler fought so hard.

Jackie Wullschlager

There is an entry in Ossie Clark's diaries when, after years of struggling with drug dependency, depression and poverty, he remembers the gilded life he led in the late 1960s and early 1970s as London's most fashionable designer, and wonders why "I didn't think about now, then".

The Ossie Clark Diaries is a curious book, not least because Bloomsbury probably decided to publish it on the assumption that readers would long to know what it was like to be the glittering,

glamorous Ossie of "then". But the diaries start in 1971 when Ossie's fame was waning and he was beginning a bitter battle with Celia Birtwell, his former wife, for custody of their sons.

Ossie's "then" is described, a stream-of-consciousness sketch written from memory, but his diaries grind through 33 gruelling years of subsisting on DHSS handouts, sponging off friends, and risking his life by cruising for casual sex - only for one man to grunt "I don't think I'll bother" after seeing Clark's ageing face under a streetlight. The diaries end on August 5 1996, with a glum "Gone to Holland Park. Come there if you like" note to Diego Cogliato, a young Italian drug addict whom he picked up on the street 18 months before, and who battered Ossie to death the following night.

Ossie Clark's "now" would read like a Cool Britannia morality tale of a culture which worships anyone blessed with youth, talent and beauty, only to abandon them when those attributes fade, if the working-class

Lancashire lad had not seemed so hellbent on self-destruction. Born in Liverpool in 1942, Ossie had a poor, but emotionally pampered childhood as the youngest of six children. When he won a place to study fashion at Manchester School of Art, his mother, Pam, gave up cigarettes and worked as a charlady to eke out his

THE OSSIE CLARK DIARIES
edited by Henrietta Rous
Bloomsbury £20, 402 pages

grant of £5 6s 8d a term. Ossie befriended two fellow students, Celia Birtwell and Mo McDermott, with whom he moved to London to study at the Royal College of Art. There, they met the painter, David Hockney, who had a fling with Ossie, but fell in love with Celia. Ossie graduated from the RCA with the only first-class degree of his year, and went to work with the designer Alice Pollock at Quorum, one of the new wave of Chelsea boutiques. Quorum became a totem of

swinging London. Brian Jones, the Rolling Stones guitarist, lived in the flat upstairs. Julie Christie popped in with Warren Beatty. Brigitte Bardot indulged in a £350 pair of velvet pants. Mick Jagger bought his stage clothes there. Quorum's fashion shows started after midnight, with sets by David Hockney and a couple of Beatles in the front row. Ossie went to New York with Jimi Hendrix, and to Marrakech with the Gettys. He bought a silver Buick, only to crash it three minutes after the insurance cover started.

But Ossie wept on the day that, at David Hockney's urging, he married the pregnant Celia, and was faithless throughout their marriage. Celia divorced him in 1974 (the year the diaries begin) and his life seems to have been poisoned by his unhappiness at her rejection and fears of losing his children. At 32, Ossie described himself as "rather burnt out". Partying had lost its allure, and his addictions were taking a toll, leading to a "Just say no, kids" subtext to the early diaries. "Walked home

throwing up every 10 yards," he wrote after one long night, and "back to reality and depression" on returning to London from a weekend in Paris with David Hockney.

Ossie slipped into a nightmarish cycle of bankruptcy, drugs busts, drunk driving charges and raiding friends' fridges for food. By 1987 he is fretting about shoplifting becoming "a habit", and two years later he has signed on so often that he congratulates himself for "catching out" a DHSS official. He had some joys. Ossie adored his sons, and so responsive to nature that the sight of a beautiful sky or a bird's nest lifted his spirits. When occasional orders arrived from stalwarts like Marianne Faithfull or Patti Boyd, he ended his diary entry with a joyful "Yippee!"

But for the most part the diaries are dark and depressive, and Ossie is sour and self-obsessed. He bitches about Hockney, only to call him, demanding cash for a car. He rages about Celia when she complains about his forgetting the boys' Christmas gifts,

apparently without thinking how hurt they would be. Ossie even makes the reader feel sorry for Mick Jagger, who is thanked for inviting him to a 1995 Rolling Stones concert with a terse re-

quest for a £15,000 "loan". Anyone searching for insights into Ossie Clark's heyday, or why he was such an influential fashion designer, will not find them here. But as a description of a life on the edge of modern Britain, his diaries are painful, but compelling.

Alice Rawsthorn

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FINANCIAL TIMES

ARTS

Replying to a debate about the uses of official propaganda, a British minister told Parliament in 1920: "To promote an image of one's country in time of peace is not cricket."

Cultural diplomacy is certainly not cricket. But it is a game which countries - especially those whose past looks to them more glorious than their future - continue to play with enthusiasm.

The UK's player is the gentle, 63-year-old British Council. This week, 220 of its senior personnel, half of them from overseas, spent four days in the stimulating environs of the Hilton Hotel at Gatwick airport. The summit meeting, one of the biggest conclaves in the council's history, was called to discuss what kind of Britain it is trying to promote.

As bad luck would have it, the summit came hard on the heels of the sudden resignation of the council's director-general after only 10 months in the job. Insiders stressed there was no causal connection between the

A cultural spin for 'Greensleeves'

Hard on the heels of a senior resignation, the British Council wants a new image, writes Christian Tyler

departure of Dr David Drewry, a geologist and Antarctic expert, and the strategic conference, which had been planned for some time.

Yet the mis-appointment was embarrassing, and a bad beginning for the new image which the council is trying to adopt in order to project the upbeat version of Britain - so-called "cool Britannia" - marketed by Tony Blair's government.

Drewry had been recruited for his managerial skills. But after unsuccessfully attempting to move four of the council's six top managers at one swoop, he reportedly agreed he was not after all the right person to run an institution with 6,000 staff in 109 countries and an operating budget of over £400m, or to appease the lobbies - political, bureaucratic and educational - which hover over it. For years the council has



Sudden senior departure: David Drewry



New appointment: Baroness Helena Kennedy

been trying to shed its image as a purveyor of clog dancing, "Greensleeves" and Shakespeare to culturally deprived foreigners. In fact, the arts are a small if visible part of its brief: the council's

income from English language teaching and other educational services exceeded the £184m grant from the taxpayer last year. Traditional activities include promoting British

university courses, administering examinations, running libraries, mounting exhibitions and arranging scientific exchanges. But a change of government, the recent appointment of the human rights lawyer Baroness Helena Kennedy as chairman of the board, and a review earlier this year by management consultants Wolf Olins have combined to shift the focus.

Human rights and women's rights are being added to the agenda to support the proclamation of foreign secretary Robin Cook that Britain's foreign policy will henceforth have an "ethical dimension". The Labour MP Patricia Hewitt, joint vice-chairman of the council until she became a Treasury minister, said there was an important job to be done training lawyers and other activists abroad in how to

reach people whom the Foreign Office could not aid directly.

A self-consciously multi-cultural image of a multi-ethnic Britain is being exported: the Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah, for example, has been a popular ambassador. The artistic avant-garde is favoured over the traditional, in order to give a sense of a British creative buzz. Greater efforts are being made to identify and woo young leaders of the future - politicians, businessmen and opinion moulders - who may not be members of ruling elites.

The council wants to keep closer tabs on them, as well as putting them in touch with one another. The process is part of what is known inside the organisation as "creating opportunity".

This week's conference faced a number of questions

apart from the succession. Should the council concentrate on fewer activities in fewer countries, for example by pulling out of English language teaching in nations already well provided with it? Can it persuade the government to increase the budget for cultural diplomacy? Under what rubric should it market the multifarious activities intended to win friends abroad? How can its profile be raised at home and its antiquated image updated abroad?

Few tangible initiatives emerged from the conceptual mists this week. According to one participant, the council will become more unified in its approach, more transparent in its dealings, more attentive to its "customers", more communicative internally and externally, and less shy about boasting of Britain's assets. But it will

go on teaching English in competition with others, offering a more specifically British-cultural slant.

As for the succession, the acting director-general Tom Buchanan is believed so far to have ruled himself out. Among internal candidates, the name of Edmund Marsden, an assistant DG, was being mentioned this week. So, too, was that of board member Sir Tim Lankaster, the high-flying director of the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University. A former private secretary to both James Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher, he has worked at the World Bank and the British Treasury, and was permanent secretary at the ministries of education and overseas development.

Among outsiders, the free speech campaigner Frances de Souza has been mooted. As a member of Blair's Panel 2000, the body charged with advising on the "re-branding" of Britain, she, at least, ought to know what spin to bring to the game which is not quite cricket.

Two stars for the price of one

Van Gogh was a huge fan of Millet, finds William Packer

Vincent van Gogh is rightly acknowledged beyond his general popularity as one of the founding masters of modern art, the liberator of painting from the immediate preoccupations of the personal visual response, taking it beyond Impressionism into the realm of direct, intuitive feeling and expression.

The path he opened up was soon to be followed by Matisse, Derain, Kirchner, Kandinsky, and so on down to Pollock, Bacon, de Kooning and the rest - he was the first true Expressionist. But, abstract or figurative, we have tended to dwell on the more formal and technical aspects of that subsequent development - upon the primacy of gesture and mark, of surface as surface and paint as paint - rather than the expense of what else painting might be about. Form as content, art about art, are legitimate considerations that to a great extent have set the pattern and character of the modernist inquiry, but they are not, nor have ever been, the whole story.

Far beyond his own radical instincts, painting was for van Gogh the vehicle of his thoughts, ideas and feelings, albeit often subsumed and integrated within the very matter of the paint itself. And he dealt in symbols, if often general rather than specific. Now it might be the obvious statement of a Sun, or Stars in the Sky, now merely the allusive image of corn in the field, or crows in the wind, but a symbol nonetheless.

Even his repetitively energetic, stabbing stroke of the brush becomes something of a symbol, and the hint thus hangs in the air, that from Matisse to Bacon, such painters too have always been no less engaged with

feelings, images, symbols. Expressionism, perhaps, is but Symbolism by another name.

For van Gogh there was no debate. There he was through the 1880s, the frequent intimate of the Impressionist avant-garde, familiar with their work and receptive to its influence. And yet at every recurrent crisis in his short, astonishing career, it was not to them he turned, either for practical guidance or spiritual comfort, but to the inspiration of a master already dead, Jean-François Millet. "Millet," he would write to his brother Theo, "it is Millet 'the Father', that is to say he who is guide and counsellor in everything."

When Millet died in 1875, aged 60, he was as well-known, given the technical opportunities of the day, as van Gogh was later to become through the mass reproduction of his work. His imagery, centred upon the life of the rural, labouring poor, which he observed at first hand in the countryside around Barbizon, touched common nerves of the sentimental and the religious, and engravings after such of his paintings as "The Sower" (1850) and "The Angelus" (1859) - which was later to obsess Salvador Dalí's inventively obscene imagination - were as popular as any of the 19th century.

Van Gogh would certainly have known them, but his first direct experience of the actual work seems to have been at one of the studio sales in Paris shortly after Millet's death. Thereafter, with Theo's help, he began to collect his prints, and indeed it was in working directly from such material, and by extension moving on to the direct study of the peasant subjects, that he



'Paysanne glanant' (1885) by Vincent van Gogh: "It is Millet 'the Father', that is to say he who is guide and counsellor in everything." - from, following Matisse

first began to draw and paint on his own account from 1880.

The exhibition, "Millet/Van Gogh", now at the Musée d'Orsay, is set precisely upon this creative debt of one great artist to the other, and, by no means over-large, it is full of surprises. The first indebtedness is the less remarkable. All artists must start somewhere, and while van Gogh's work of the early 1880s, before he left Antwerp for Paris in 1886, is impressive as much for the speed of its maturing as its manifest authority, the debt was open and the work entirely individual.

What is the more intriguing

is his repeated revisiting of Millet, for reasons that betray a deep personal and emotional dependency. Whenever the religious yearning that remained deep in his tormented nature reasserts itself, most especially at Arles in 1888 and during his time in the asylum at St Remy in 1889, it is to Millet that he turns, reworking many of the most famous images in his own terms - "The Sower" cast now into silhouette by the blinding sun behind him; the midday "Siesta" beneath the haystack; the labourer pausing on his coat of the valedictory "End of the Day".

Theo had sent him the full

set of engravings after Millet's "The Work of the Fields", and here are nine of his 10 versions, with several of the Millet originals beside. It is, throughout, the direct comparison between the two artists that is the most exciting, with van Gogh's repositioning of colour from the secondary reference in black-and-white to set against Millet's own distinctive palette and handling of the paint.

Where does that leave Millet? The short answer is not remotely as the minor object of a greater painter's arbitrary and sentimental admiration. And in the company of van Gogh, we also look again at Millet the painter,

and to his advantage - at the close response to Nature observed, and to the surprising immediacy and intensity of that response. His "Wood-gatherers returning, laden with Fagots" (1874), unfinished no doubt, is yet an astonishing canvas, loose in its handling, bold and simple in the drawing, rich in the paint, an uncanny prefiguring of van Gogh himself. This exhibition celebrates two Stars.

Millet/Van Gogh: Musée d'Orsay, 1 rue de la Légion d'Honneur (formerly rue de Bellechasse), Paris 7, until January 3; sponsored by LVMEH/Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton.

Theatre / Alastair Macaulay

Distracted by Macbeth

While some regional British theatres keep winning nationwide attention - as when Ian McKellen performs *The Seagull* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse - others are struggling to stay open, and many will go under. One such is the Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich.

In recent years, it has had a distinguished record on paper; it has often been the first regional theatre to present plays that recently succeeded in the West End, such as Tom Stoppard's *Arctic* and Terry Johnson's *Dead Funny*. Nonetheless, its audience has shrunk, and its artistic director since 1997, Andrew Manley, has not been able to stop the shrinkage. The local council has expressed reluctance about further funding.

Tempting fate, I went to

see Manley's production of *Macbeth* on Friday the 13th. What I found was an oddly split experience. Before moving to Ipswich, Manley was artistic director at Harrogate, and his Ipswich *Macbeth* reminds me strongly of his Harrogate *Out On A Hot Tin Roof*. On the one hand, the acting is committed, coherent, unpretentious; on the other hand, the visual and acoustic surround is pretentious and distracting.

First, the bad news. An electronic buzz or whirr continues non-stop throughout, and other sound effects are added. This listening to Shakespeare's words is an effort of will. Though the decor is vaguely futuristic, it obliges actors to climb up and down ladders; its floor has holes and gaps which actors negotiate at their peril. Multiple video screens

project odd imagery. At no point do any of these factors lead one deeper into Shakespeare's play.

Now, the good news. What the actors do is the opposite of what the rest of the production does: they give you *Macbeth* itself, in which characters speak the words simply and sincerely as if they meant them. This is rarer than you might think: seldom today does one encounter honest acting in *Macbeth*, which is frequently over-interpreted and/or under-felt. Here, however, the relationship between the Macbeths (Jonathan Wrather, Orlaia Walters) is fresh, passionate, sexual.

Both Macbeths are young and urgent. Macbeth is vigorous, impatient, ambitious, neurotic; Lady Macbeth is voluptuous, elegant, tough, initially ruthless, only later

afflicted by doubt. The entire play is given by a total of nine actors. Though some individuals are weak, Julian Harries is outstanding as Banquo. This is not a brilliantly insightful account; but, if only the production did not get in its way, it would be a true one.

Another piece of good news is that Jonathan Wrather, the Macbeth, has often worked with Manley before. Wrather has fierce intensity, striking looks, a vivid nervous system intelligently deployed. As Macbeth, however, he uses too shallow a voice; the cropped haircut is a mistake; he has not learnt to let the lines breathe. The role needs more weight and depth if the dark core of the play is to absorb us.

This *Macbeth* should be better than it is, but it shows clearly that, if the Wolsey is forced to close, several virtues rare in theatre today will be lost with it.

Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich. To December 4.

CORRECTION

Masterworks

In the article "Masterworks put market to the test" on page 9 of the weekend issue November 7/8, the painting "Jeune Fille Blonde" by Pierre Auguste Renoir was listed as coming up at auction later this month at Christie's in London. This painting is not coming up at auction and is currently in a private collection. We regret the error.

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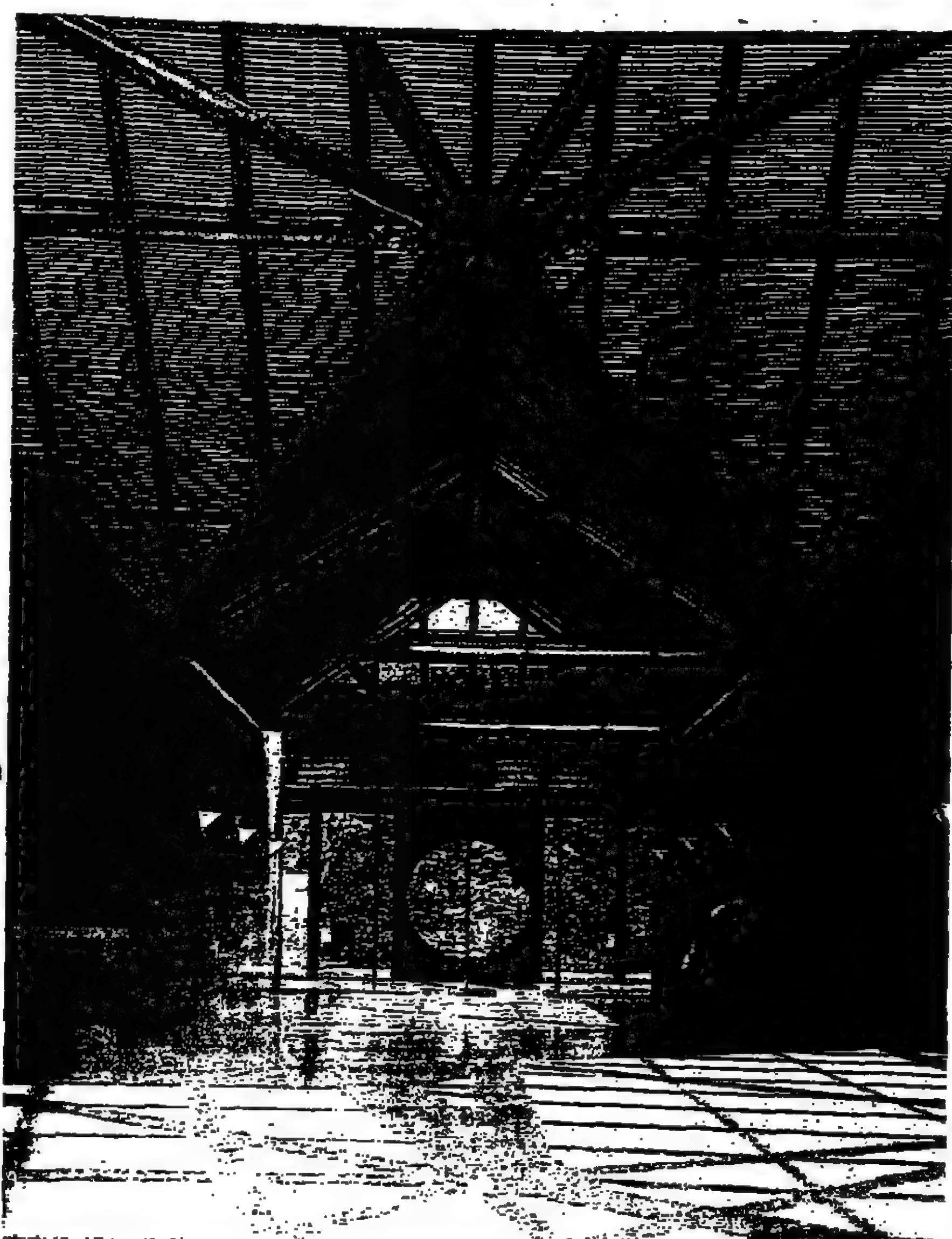
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And leads it to a better life
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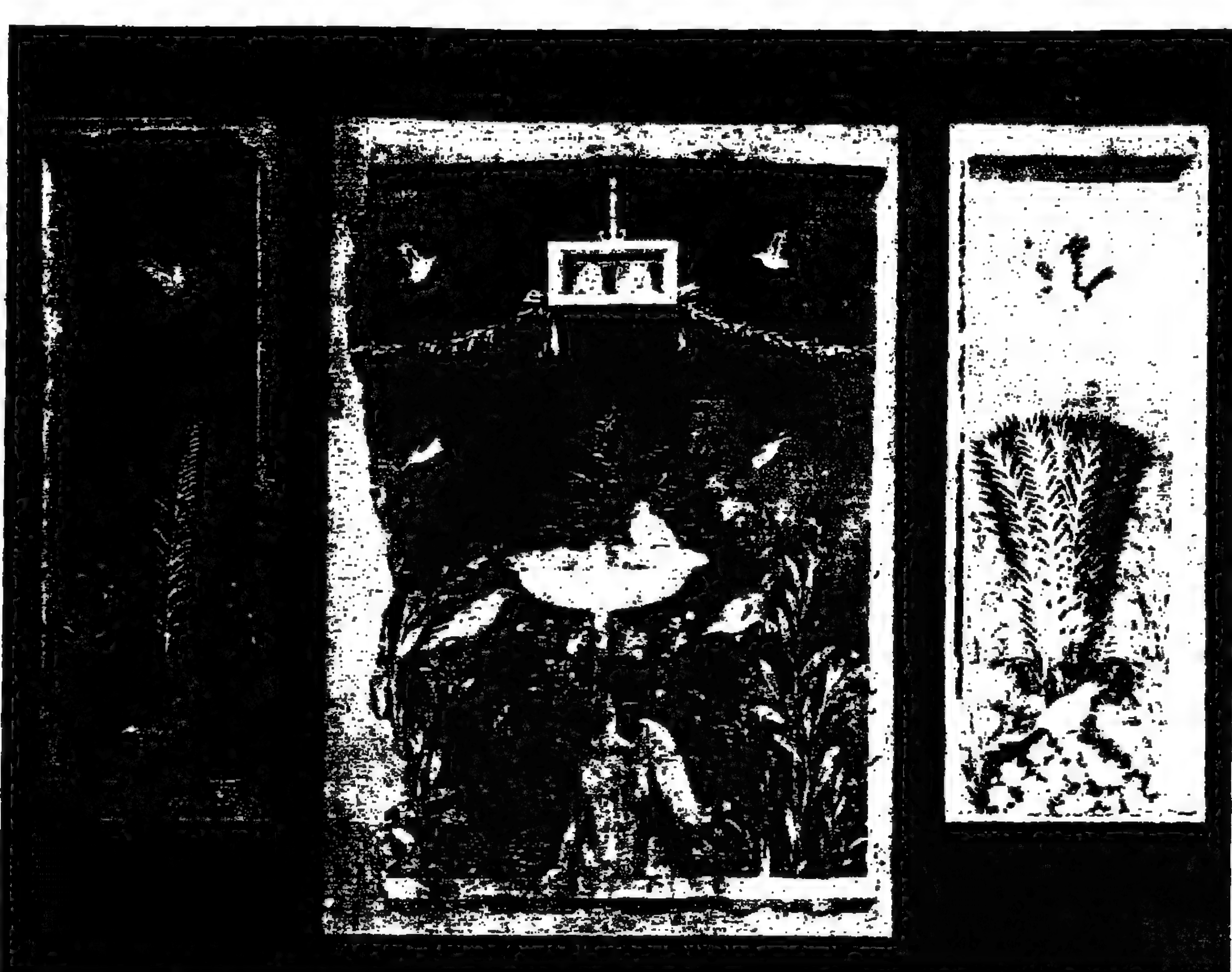
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Miho Museum: the central atrium of the entrance hall



A purifying experience? Roman fresco panels, 1st century AD, among the stunning edifices

Deep in the magic mountain

Lynn MacRitchie on a remote Japanese museum founded by a religious sect

A visit to the Miho Museum in Japan throws up a lot of contradictions. An ultra-modern museum, buried in an ancient mountainside. A collection of rare and precious objects, chosen not for their impeccable provenance but for their "spiritual quality". A spiritual society that believes in the beauty and purity of nature and buses people up a mountain to prove it.

Sited in the Shigaraki Mountains near Kyoto, the museum, which celebrates its first anniversary this month, is the idea of Mihoko Koyama, wealthy founder of the Shinsei Shumelkai "spiritual society", set up in 1970 and based on the teachings of Mokichi Okada, her own spiritual teacher.

Now known as the Shumelkai Family, and with 300,000 followers in Japan and abroad, they believe body and soul can be purified by appreciation of beauty, of which works of art are the truest expression. It is this belief that underlies the setting up of the Miho Museum, designed for Koyama by I.M. Pei, architect of the Bank of China building in Hong Kong and the Louvre's glass pyramid.

Her invitation to Pei in 1991 had far-reaching consequences. He took charge of the whole concept of the museum, from selecting the site to advising on the collection, insisting that it be expanded from the several hundred objects associated with the Japanese tea ceremony which Koyama had assembled over 40 years.

To attract visitors to its remote site, the museum needed to be unique, he explained. Why not use it to trace the connection between traditional Japanese and ancient western art? So, while Pei began to build - slicing the top off the mountain to facilitate construction - Koyama went to market. Her first purchase of non-western art was a magnificent central Asian Gandhara Buddha from the second century AD, and other rare and precious objects followed. So, seven years after it was conceived, Koyama's memorial has become a western-style museum, complete with western problems such as a too large collection and an unclear exhibitions policy.

But it needn't have been like this. A woman rich enough to move mountains to house her art

collection could surely display it in any way she and her followers might choose. But a visit to this mountain-top eyrie is a puzzling experience.

Just getting to the Miho Museum is like a test of dedication. First, there is the two-hour crawl through dense traffic out of Kyoto. Then the road begins to climb, its sides falling away into a deep valley, covered in dark pine forest, the sort of landscape glimpsed in ancient Japanese scroll paintings. From the coach drop-off point, visitors must walk or ride on electric cars through a tunnel penetrating the mountain, then cross a bridge over a deep valley to reach the museum entrance on the next ridge.

While this might be romantic - Pei likes to quote the 4th century Chinese tale *French Blossom Spring*, which tells of a humble fisherman transported through a mountain to a paradise on the other side, as his inspiration - one has the impression of being processed, controlled, one's responses not quite one's own. Once on the mountain, the

Miho experience takes over - there is no possibility of independent action. Also, the respect for nature which the museum so spectacularly demonstrates - the soil and rubble dug to clear the mountain top was returned to the site to cover up the main body of the building, now buried beneath pine-clad slopes - is contradicted by the building on the next mountain top, the Shinsei Shumelkai shrine at Misono.

It is normally closed to non-Shumelkai Family members, but journalists attending the museum's anniversary celebrations were permitted a visit. The huge, soaring shrine building, was designed by Minoru Yamasaki and completed in 1982. Seating almost 6,000 with room for more in adjoining buildings, it takes command of the mountain top, a parade-ground like space cleared out in front of it, with a belltower by Pei set at one corner.

At the museum itself, the only hint of the existence of the Fam-

ily is the view of the roof of the shrine and the belltower, which visitors may glimpse from the museum's entrance hall. But, for this visitor at least, knowing about the sect made viewing the objects a less than comfortable experience. For while westerners may be used to the notion of the rich and philanthropic collector - indeed, Koyama's closest counterpart would seem to be Paul Getty, whose idiosyncratic collection has also found a home high on a mountain top in Los Angeles - we tend to be uncomfortable with the idea of spiritual societies. Indeed, the sight of 10,000 Family members leaving their monthly service at the shrine the day we visited struck chills in a sceptical heart.

Not that they were secretive: while no written material on their beliefs was available, their spokesman seemed open, answering our rudest questions without hesitation. The Family holds a monthly service, a mixture of Shinto and Buddhist rituals based around a concept of "healing light", make personal testi-

monies and listen to an address from Koyama's daughter, Hiroko, the society's president. Between services, members engage in good works or improve themselves with classes, including natural agriculture and, of course, the tea ceremony.

Although the devotees seem scrambling into their coaches to leave after the service seemed ordinary enough, the sect does have several very wealthy members, foremost of whom is Koyama (whose family founded the Osaka-based Toyobo company, Japan's leading manufacturer of textiles and packaging materials). Members pay a one-off donation on joining and donations paid for the construction of the museum, which cost between \$200m and \$300m, and for the objects in it, which Mrs Koyama continues to collect on the "Family's" behalf.

It is a spiritual quality that she looks for in the objects that the world's leading dealers in ancient art arrange for her to see. Whatever one may think of art as a hearer of enlightenment, Koya-

ma's choices seem inspired - to a non-expert eye, the objects from Egypt, the near east and the classical world were stunning.

The significance of the collection would seem to be confirmed by the 1996 tour of selected items to the Los Angeles County Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

For these unable to make the pilgrimage to Japan, objects from the collection will tour Europe next year, with appearances in Vienna and possibly London, and further tours and exchanges are planned. The intervention of Pei has indeed secured a broader stage for a collection whose quality alone should ideally secure it the widest possible audience.

But the mountain-top museum remains a not quite comfortable place to visit, like stepping into an exquisite fairy tale, where east and west can meet, admire but still not quite understand each other.

The Miho Museum, 300, Momodani, Shigaraki, Shiga, 529-18 Japan. Tel: 0748 82 3411, fax: 0748 82 3414. Anniversary exhibition runs until December 15, after which the museum closes until March 15. Travel - by road from Kyoto, or by train/bus from Kyoto Station to Ishiyama Station, followed by bus which leaves every hour.

Is it simply age or a post-unnoticed-mortem descent into the limbo reserved for critics, but is there a terrible cyclical regularity in the recurrence of the same old subjects? Monday's *Start the Week* - a myth exploding, Jeremy Paxman's egghead status has taken a beating from his exposure to teen minds as opposed to mere politicians - dealt with, guess what, English class-awakeners. In fact, it was slightly more interesting than promised: not so much the class system as our obsession with it, a very different matter.

The discussion itself was a good example of British (or English - there are distinctions to be made, but Paxman is not the chairman to make them) self-absorption. Navel-gazing one would be tempted to call it, did not a route up some other orifice suggest itself. It illustrated the old query as to what he

knows of England who only England knows? Thank heaven for Antonia Byatt, who indicated a world outside by mentioning the egalitarian Dutch, *à propos* the alleged link between monarchy and class. She might also have adduced the Danes, Swedes and Norwegians as paradoxical proof that the most classless countries in the western world are constitutional monarchies. She very sensibly alluded to the class-consciousness of the French, the most virulently snobbish race in Europe. American class attitudes (they exist) were skated over, all the more disappointing since the affable and perceptive

bicultural Bill Bryson was present, if rather excluded. No, perhaps this sense of *déjà vu* owes more to advancing years. Did Mark Lawson really have to explain to *Front Row* listeners that Americans call robbery "a heist"? This was in Monday's creakily obvious piece on movie (or film, as the English call it) car chases. We were told that they must be carefully directed and often use stunt men; streets and pedestrian access must be cleared; and sometimes the cars are not going as fast as they seem on screen. Wow. These backstage secrets are heady stuff.

Pop goes the BBC's *sold-out* cultural coverage. Pop!

goes the socio-economic system sometimes too, according to Thursday's new series of that name, looking at "bubbles, booms and crashes". Presented by economist Bridget Rosewell, Michael Blastland's production at first seemed over-eager to capture the younger vote with the aural equivalent of the whizz-bang visual so fashionable on youth TV some years ago: sound effects of traffic jams, bursts of song ("I'm forever blowing bubbles") and even the probable first performance in 200 years of Thomas D'Urville's "The Bubble-Bubble Ballad", thanks naturally to a US university.

Over-exuberant presenta-

tion was soon forgiven since the programme was packed with information, and raced through diverse authorities and experts with dazzling ease. Brian Sewell on Hogarth showed how well visual art can be described on radio. References included Blake and Bagehot; speakers included the acting Master of Balliol, the president of the Economic History Association of America, and the editor of the *Financial Times*. The latter, Richard Lambert, displayed a relaxed radio persona as he recalled a Scots speculator in ancient *regime* France to whom dukes and duchesses flocked in search of shares. One woman stalker even

staged a traffic accident, overturning her carriage in his presence, so he would rush to her aid. When she confessed her subterfuge, the canny adventurer "smiled and entered her into his books".

Smiles were replaced by mud when the Mississippi bubble burst; as painful as the dyspepsia doubtless felt by the Dutchman who mistook a bulb for an onion in the great tulip bubble of the 1630s, thereby eating the value of a house. Next week: more on "herdism", the mob mentality that sweeps everyone before it, according to Mackay's disapproving *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and Madness of*

Crowds (1841), entertainingly drawn on in this programme, and the mass fickleness that reduces us to "the inferior forms of humanity: women, children and savages".

Tuesday's *The Choice* was one of the best, both moving and disturbing. Michael Buerk tactfully questioned Anne Rogers on her decision to keep her son alive, now requiring a team of 14 cars at home, after an accident had reduced him to "persistent vegetative state" at 17. Given the medical profession's increasing inclination to switch off the machine, to withdraw food and liquids, it was frightening to hear of the post mortem that revealed one such victim's brain to be unharmed. A blood clot on the brain-stem had merely paralysed her; the girl had probably been aware of family and doctors around her bed deciding to let her die. The allegedly vegetative young man has been known to smile, even say "amen" at the confirmation his mother arranged in accordance with his previous wishes. A powerful programme that raised painful issues.

A quick salute to a master broadcaster. *Antonia Byatt*: A *Celebration* reminded us that *Letter from America* has clocked up over half a century; that its scribe is a musician and film-buff; that he served on a committee on the English language with Bernard Shaw; and that despite working for *The Guardian* he has been an exemplary practitioner of that language for his 90 years.

Radio / Martin Hoyle

Here we go round the mulberry bush

Transferred from the little Bridewell Theatre to the Vaudeville, with a partly new cast and doubtless some revisions, Jerry Herman's *The Best of Times* is going to make a lot of audiences very happy. It isn't a musical, but a string of 40-odd songs from eight of Herman's shows: seven from Broadway - *Asante Mame*, *Hello, Dolly!*, *La Cage aux Folles*, etc. - and one (*Mrs Santa Claus*) from television.

Very few words are spoken. We get individual songs in their own right, not as echoes of the original shows; some have even changed their sex. But as "conceived" by Paul Gilger, and directed and choreographed by Bill Starr, the sequence is more fun than the mere sum of its songs. Those are potently dovetailed, danced, freshly reprinted, shared by different voices and turned into ensembles. The result becomes an Olympian conspectus of what Herman can do.

And what does he do? He is a thorough professional

who writes effective, instantly appealing numbers in a familiar idiom for a wide range of Broadway shows - though he is canny enough not to tie them too explicitly to the action (they travel better without such luggage). Music and words, invariably, that's his special gift.

His lyrics are deft, sometimes witty, always "natural" - you hear somebody actually speaking; his tunes answer with deceptive ease to real-life speech-rhythms and emphases. Somehow that demotic fluency clings to the tunes even when hummed wordlessly, on the way home from the show. As you step into your cab or on to the Tube, your head will

be full of hummable tunes. By the end of the ride, nonetheless, they may have melted indistinguishably into a lot of other Broadway tunes. Herman's rarely stray far from a home key and the basic "three chord" routine - though successive verses and choruses are routinely raised a semi-tone for excitement, and the last choruses routinely belted out at half-speed, with hefty drum-thwacks on the off-beat.

Those are cheap thrills that work only while the show goes on. But *The Best of Times* is a show, and while it goes on they do work: the six-strong cast ensures that its linchpin is the singer-pianist James Follwell, the only authenti-

cally American voice here (frank and raspy intimate). He also had a hand in the clever arrangements, and his pianism is ultra-professional, though I could have done without his fake-Rakhmaninov titivations. The other performers do their feisty best, which is more than enough. Kathryn Evans has a torchy smoulder and a fine brassy edge; Lindsay Hamilton boasts her own vein of wry comedy, and shoulders up to soulful outpourings, too. Sarah Payne does the ditsy blondes winningly, and more. Garth Bardley is incessantly apt in a great variety of roles and songs. Young Jamie Golding, who began his career at 11 and hasn't aged much - the pushed-in face and sticking-out ears help - tackles another wide range.

The sound-engineering is faultless, like Hugh Durran's elegant, simple designs and Robin Carter's constantly inventive lighting. A lot of people, I should guess, will want to see this show two or three times.

Theatre / David Murray

Hummable happiness

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Good times: from left, Kathryn Evans and Sarah Payne

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SPORT / MOTORING



Men in the middle David Shepherd: 'I think the press in England is the hardest in the world, although I might be proved wrong in South Africa'

Cricket

Hard to keep the ball rolling and look over your shoulder

Christopher Lyles assesses one of the loneliest jobs in sport - that of the Test match umpire

Last Saturday, David Shepherd was delivering newspapers for his brother on a cold Devon morning. Today he is flying to Johannesburg to officiate in the opening two Test matches of West Indies' first official tour to South Africa, when he will again be put under the magnifying glass of the cricket-watching world.

Brian Lara versus Allan Donald. Concerted appeals of "Howzat", and worse, as the batsman is wrapped on the pads yet again. Ear-splitting cries of "Catch it" as fielders proceed to converge in a triumphant huddle. Welcome to the world of the contemporary Test umpire who also has to carry out his job under the unremitting scrutiny of the world's media - where every decision is subjected to countless television "super slow-motion" replays before being further picked over by the newspapers. "We've got the best seat in the ground and the worst," says fellow international umpire Peter Willey.

Players have the right to expect the highest umpiring standards but an umpire's role has become increasingly demanding as excessive appeals and the

reluctance of the batsman to "walk" have pervaded the game. Couple these with the advance of TV technology and it is akin to living in a high-tech goldfish bowl.

"If you get someone who walks these days, it is like winning the National Lottery," adds Willey, who played 26 Tests for England from 1976 to 1986. "People say modern sport is about winning, winning, winning. I think it is a sad thing for the game of cricket that this mass appealing has come in. When I played, we appealed when we thought it was out."

Shepherd is even more candid. "If a player knows that he is out and doesn't leave his ground, then in my book he is cheating," says the man who played for Gloucestershire before being appointed to the first-class umpires' list in 1981.

"Some people might say that he has cheated the umpire, but he has actually cheated his fellow professionals. Funny enough, I think television can help. Although it is hard going for the umpires at the moment, players will be shown up to be cheats and that should help the game in the long run."

Thanks to the sponsorship of

National Grid, owner and operator of the electricity transmission system in England and Wales, every Test is adjudicated by a neutral umpire, as well as by a local official, in the expectation that a fairer environment will

'If a player knows that he is out and doesn't leave his ground, then in my book he is cheating'

exist. (There is a strong case for appointing two neutral umpires.) Shepherd was one of the first International Cricket Council (ICC) umpires to preside abroad - in 1982 - as part of a pilot scheme also created to improve the standard of worldwide umpiring. A formal panel was established in 1994. It now consists of 20 umpires, with all nine Test-playing nations represented.

The umpires are advised of their next appointment by the ICC about six weeks in advance, although they must keep their inoculations up to date, and fly business class, normally arriving several days in advance to acclimatise. "It is a great opportunity to see the rest of the world, although it can be a bit tiring at times," adds Shepherd, who can expect to earn £3,000-£3,500 for umpiring one Test.

"Last winter I travelled to Pakistan, Zimbabwe and India, and there was a gap of only four or five days between the finish of the match in Bulawayo, where Zimbabwe were playing Pakistan, and the Test in Bangalore between India and Australia."

Willey, who has also officiated all over the world, umpired a Test between Pakistan and Australia in Rawalpindi seven weeks ago. "I hadn't been to Pakistan for about 20 years," he said. "It was a marvellous week, a very good cricket match and great crowds." He is due to umpire two matches between West Indies and Australia in the Caribbean next March.

Two other ICC umpires, Englishman Mervyn Kitchen and Pakistani Javed Akhtar, were piloted by the British press for

some of the decisions they gave, (or did not give) in the England-South Africa series this summer.

"I find the pressure a little less intense when I umpire abroad where I don't think the newspapers and television are as personal and intrusive," declares Shepherd, who has officiated in more than 40 Tests since 1985. "I think the press in England is the hardest in the world, although I might be proved wrong in South Africa."

How long they may be flying to such places is a moot point, as the possibility of computer-programmed decision-making grows. "I think that, eventually and unfortunately, all umpiring will one day be done by television and computers," says Willey. "The umpires will be in the middle counting the deliveries and calling the no-balls. It will be a sad day for the game when it does happen."

Shepherd believes banning players from matches, which the referee is entitled to do, could end the current malaise - and he does not exclude captains. "The best way of administering justice is by suspending players," he concludes. "And it is a law of the game that the captain is responsible for the actions of his team."

Michael Thompson-Noel

Jumps are riding for a fall

British jumps racing, which annually kills or maims hundreds of racehorses, was in the dog house again this week when Tony McCoy, the champion jumps jockey, received an 18-day ban for excessive use of the whip. Moreover, he was told by the Jockey Club he must undergo a day's coaching on proper use of the whip at the British Racing School in Newmarket.

I have no time for McCoy, or for anyone connected with jumps racing. One day, it will be banned, and good riddance to it. But it cannot be denied that the UK racing authorities have handled the whole whip business with skill and intelligence.

Asked whether his punishments would make him change his whipping style, McCoy said: "Obviously, to keep within the guidelines - yes. I will do my best. I will still be as keen to win as ever, but hopefully without breaking any rules."

And Christopher Hall, chairman of the disciplinary panel which pondered McCoy's case, said: "The [Jockey Club's] whip instruction has, in the main, been a success. It is generally agreed that... jockeys' riding styles have improved considerably and, as a result, horses are hit less hard and less often."

But why, when jockeys are penalised for over-whipping, are the horses themselves so seldom disqualified? If owners forfeited prize money every time their jockeys broke the whipping rules, the problem would evaporate. Non?

It is not quite as simple as that. The man in charge of disciplinary and licensing matters at the Jockey Club is the supply-minded and articulate Malcolm Wallace, who told me: "Horses can win races even though the rules have been breached. For example, it would seem very unfair to take a race away from a horse that would have won anyway" - irrespective of whether its jockey had broken the whipping rule.

But what about cases where the horse ran just a little bit faster than it might have, and won a race it might have lost, I asked.

"Ah," said Wallace. "But I don't believe that whipping necessarily makes a horse run faster, do you? When it does win, you'd be very hard pressed to prove that the winning was directly connected to the whipping."

That is true. In the end, though, no amount of smooth talking will save jumps racing from the chop.

□□□□

What a week for Dennis Rodman, the bad boy of basketball and one of my all-time sporting heroes.

On Tuesday, Dennis The Menace confirmed he was indeed married to former *Baywatch* actress Carmen Electra - and said he was happy about it. Rodman is so cool that in 1995 he bought a T-shirt in a West Hollywood shop that stated: "I'm not gay but my boyfriend is."

Dennis and Carmen were married in Las Vegas last Saturday. On Monday, however, Rodman's agent questioned whether the marriage was legal, claiming the Chicago Bulls star was drunk at the time. "Obviously anyone that would marry somebody that was intoxicated to the point that they couldn't speak or stand had ulterior motives of some sort," Rodman's agent, Dwight Manley, told the Associated Press news agency on Monday. Manley claimed Rodman had been taken advantage of by Electra and by people he called "leeches".

But Rodman, in a handwritten statement, said subsequently he was in love with Carmen, and apologised "for any false statements given on my behalf regarding my marriage to Carmen Electra".

The two exchanged vows at A Little Chapel of the Flowers on the Vegas Strip. Cheryl Vernon, supervisor of the Clark County Marriage License Bureau, said a licence would never have been issued to someone who appeared intoxicated. Just as well, really, considering Vegas's non-stop japes and jollification.

□□□□

Burn-out is a problem afflicting most professional sports, though little seems to be done about it. It makes you wonder whether the people running these sports know what they are doing.

Take tennis. Professional tennis players lead cosseted lives, but burn-out troubles them, as Spain's road-weary duo of Arantxa Sanchez Vicario and Conchita Martinez indicated when turning in sluggish performances in opening-night losses at New York's Madison Square Garden at the season-ending Chase Championships this week. The Spaniards - both are 26 and both were seeded - lost tough first-set tie-breaks and had nothing left to give in the second set. They said they were fatigued by an over-long season.

Martinez, who reached the Australian Open final in January, said: "We end the year on November 22 and then we have to re-start in January. It's like: go, go, go. By the end of the year, most players are either burned out or injured."

There is plenty of evidence to support her claim. Venus Williams pulled out of the tournament with a recurring left knee injury. Steffi Graf is coming back from yet more surgery. Jana Novotna missed three recent tournaments with a back problem. Martina Hingis skipped three with an ankle sprain. And world No 1 Lindsay Davenport was nursing a sore elbow all summer.

"Everybody is coming to this tournament really tired," said Sanchez Vicario, the reigning French Open champion, who is usually known as the distaff game's most tenacious battler, a female Michael Chang. "We don't have a [proper] off-season."

She added: "We play because we like it, because it is our profession." But players' complaints were usually ignored. "Whoever is responsible should listen and maybe change things," she said.

Motoring

Beetlemania hits the road again

Stuart Marshall drives the reborn Beetle and discovers a Golf under the sassy restyling

Logic says that if you want a Volkswagen Golf, you should buy one that is Golf-shaped. Emotion - in this case a mix of nostalgia and a desire for individuality - says you must have a new VW Beetle, which looks like a chubbier version of the old one but is utterly different underneath (a VW Golf actually).

When I first saw a styling concept of the car more than four years ago at the Geneva motor show I had two thoughts: VW had either gone mad or had felt the need to attract publicity with a joke idea it had no intention of pursuing.

Having motored for nearly a decade in five Beetles in a row, I knew the nature of the beast. A great car in its time, it had been left behind when the world moved on to small family cars with front-wheel drive and east-west mounted liquid-cooled engines. More than that,

they also had rear seats you could sit in without your head touching the back window and proper boots, not a bogey hole you reached by pulling forward the rear-seat backrest, plus a shallow space up front, shared with spare wheel and petrol tank.

The idea of bringing the Beetle back to life began in 1991 in the US, where it had been as commercially successful as its successor, the Rabbit - a Golf to you and me - had been a dead loss. Three years later a Beetle concept with rear-wheel drive had been the sensation of the 1994 Detroit automobile show. American VW dealers clamoured for it to go into production. Startled and delighted, VW decided to make a new Beetle, but only if it could be based on a front-wheel drive platform.

Eighteen months later, in October 1995, a Beetle look-alike with Golf front-wheel drive underpinnings was acclaimed at the Tokyo

motor show. A few weeks later VW management decided to put it into production at its Puebla plant in Mexico because it lay within the North American free trade area. (VW always saw the US as far and away the biggest potential market.)

Last January the car went on sale in the US, where it was snatched from dealers' showrooms. So great was the buying frenzy that some new Beetles commanded double the list price when sold on. Next month, when it becomes available in Germany, buyers will find long waiting lists.

When I drove it this month in the flat countryside near VW's vast plant at Wolfsburg, near Hanover, it was nothing like the Beetles I had known. In them, you drove with your legs forward and your feet somewhere beyond the windscreen.

This car has as large and flat a fascia as you might find in a Sharan people car-



Volkswagen's sculptured new Beetle: nostalgia on wheels with some familiar components under the retro-styled body

rier. Its only instrument is a single dial as big as a desert plate above the steering column, with speedometer, rev counter and fuel gauge.

Between it and a centre console with radio and ventilation controls is a flower vase. (Funny enough, I don't remember having one in any of my five old Beetles but it is held to be an authentic bit of nostalgia.)

The front windscreen pillars of the new car are so wide they each have a built-in loudspeaker at the base and are a touch

obstructive to visibility in traffic. A bonnet that disappears just in front of the parked screen wipers may also take a little getting used to. In every other respect the new Beetle goes and feels like the latest Golf, which is exactly what one would expect.

Only two engines are offered at present to European buyers, a 1.9-litre, 90-horsepower, direct-injection turbo-diesel and a 2.0-litre 115-horsepower petrol unit. I preferred the diesel, as did many of the international

motoring press at the launch.

Higher gearing made it more relaxed at speed on the autobahn, greater torque produced at a lower engine speed gave it lively pick-up and acceleration without changing down. Fourth was an ideal overtaking gear. It also uses far less fuel; the turbo-diesel should average 54mpg (5.2l/100km) against 32.5mpg for the lower-geared petrol version.

The new Beetle rode resiliently (though Germany's beautifully smooth roads are

hardly a stern test), it had quick steering and nimble handling. Thick windscreen pillars apart, the main snags are poor rear-seat headroom and not much boot space, though the back seat folds forward to make a good-sized load floor.

When you lift the boot lid, it looks just like an old Beetle's engine compartment, except that it has a flat, carpeted floor instead of being filled with a sheet-metal shroud, air-cooled boxer-motor, which has horizontally-opposed cylinders.

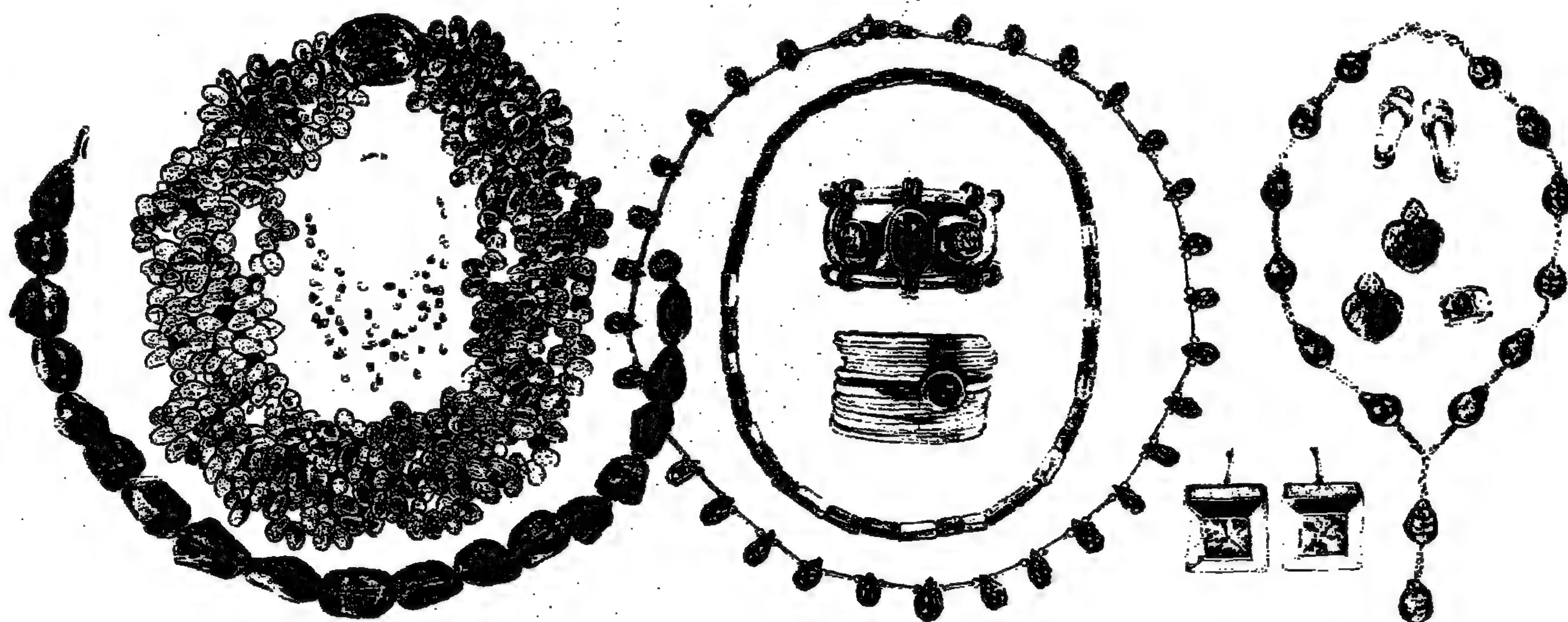
Who will buy the car? In the US, buyers have traded in every kind of car from domestic and imported luxury models to sports two-seaters. In Europe, I see it having huge appeal for the mainly young car owners who now drive uncomfortable on-off-road 4x4s or Japanese sports coupes out of a desire to be different.

"Think of it not as the daughter of an old Beetle but the sister of the new Golf," was how a senior VW manager described it. The new Beetle would stir memories and emotions, he said, and make streets prettier and more cheerful. I can't disagree but, when the time came to write a cheque, I would still have a Golf.

In the US, the new Beetle sells from \$21,500 (£13,000). European prices have not been announced but early next year Volkswagen UK expects to have modest numbers of 2.0-litre petrol-engined models to sell with left-hand drive only for about £18,200.

Right-hand drive sales will not start until the end of 1999. The left-hand drive cars will have the same comprehensive specification as the forthcoming right-hand drive versions; all will have ABS brakes, twin-frontal and lateral airbags, air conditioning, power-operated windows and mirrors, alloy wheels and a flower vase. Clever dealers will probably throw a rosebud in for free.

How to Spend It



□ Far left group: String of irregular amethysts, £365, Kiki McDonough; freshwater bubble pearls with citrine centre set in white gold, £1,200, Susan Lennox; floating necklace of blue topaz, peridot, amethyst, citrine and white freshwater pearls, £95, Heavenly Necklaces.

□ Centre: Faceted emeralds on 14 carat gold tubes, £200, Susan Lennox; necklace of blue tourmaline and platinum lozenges, £3,250, Cox & Power; 18 carat yellow gold large "Bombé" ring set with an octagon emerald and diamond tapers, £10,500, Louise Sinclair; stack of 20 18-carat gold and silver rings with a green tourmaline set in an 18-carat gold ring, £330, by Anna Ophir at Jess James.

□ Left: Platinum stud earrings set with diamonds, £1,655, Jess James; grey Tahitian or South Sea pearls on an 18-carat white or yellow gold chain, £1,500, Susan Lennox; 18-carat gold ring with pink tourmaline and diamonds, £1,850; silver and gold earrings, £200; 18 carat white gold, pavé-set diamond and faceted amethyst heart earrings, £1,600, all Kiki McDonough.

Drawings by Margaret Keedy right through the day. Look out, too, for a good selection of interesting - but not too experimental - rings at prices starting from about £1,200.

ADDRESSES:
 ■ Browns, 23-27 South Molton Street, London W1Y 1DA. Tel: 0171 491 7833.
 ■ Cox & Power, 95 Walton Street, London SW3 2HP and at Liberty.
 ■ Kiki McDonough, 77c Walton Street, London SW3 2HT. Tel: 0171 581 1777 (mail order brochure).
 ■ Jess James, 3 Newburgh Street, Soho, London W1V 1LH. Tel: 0171 437 0199.
 ■ Susan Lennox Jewellery from Robinson Valentine, Mill's Yard, Hugon Road, London SW6. Tel: 0171 736 4068 and from Catherine Grosvenor, 3 Elystan Street, London SW3. Tel: 0171 584 2112. For other information call Susan Lennox on 0171 584 2547 or her mobile 09736 38977.
 ■ Louise Sinclair, 160 Walton Street, London SW3 2JL. Tel: 0171 584 0606.

Less flash, but still sparkling

Restraint is the watchword of today's jewellers, says Lucia van der Post

I can't help a sneaking feeling of sympathy for all those grand jewellers with their matching sets of perfectly cut cabochons, their glittering gems, their fine gold and platinum. All that craft, all that design, and - let's not mince our words - all that money wrapped up in such small packages.

But take a look at the pages of the glossy magazines, at the images we should aspire to, and there is scarcely a jewel in sight. Necks are bare, ears unadorned, only on a finger can the glint of a jewel still be seen.

But real jewellery has not gone away - it's just adapted

to changing times. There are still immensely grand pieces in posh jewellers' windows, but enter the daunting portals and you'll find trays of sleeker, more modern pieces that echo the current mood for understated luxury.

Emeralds, at their most modern, come rough cut and looped along a simple string. Handfuls of semi-precious stones - zircons, aquamarines, garnets, citrines - are bundled together to look

artless, informal and decorative.

Whereas once a diamond necklace would have meant intricate settings and elaborate designs, today it is some fancy (brown) gems floating at intervals along a sleek gold wire.

Pearls or semi-precious stones are strung into ropes which can be knotted casually around the throat. Stones are mixed for decorative effect. As Theo Fennell puts it: "A growing awareness of other stones means jewellers can use stones other than the big four - diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires - and this gives them a larger palette to work with."

Energetic ambitious young jewellers, mostly women, are putting together collections which they believe speak more directly to the needs of modern women. They know that what we need are pieces that we can put on for the school-run in the morning and wear right through until after a visit to the theatre or dinner with friends.

Their operations are usu-

ally small and their overheads not huge and if the size or colour or design is not to your fancy, they'll make something that is.

Young fashion editors about town are heading for Browns, or for à la Mode where Marie-Hélène de Tailleur's infinitely modern take on precious and semi-precious stones perfectly suits their pared-down Marc Jacobs or matted wool Narciso Rodriguez. She'll float a single pearl or diamond on the thinnest thread so it seems to float against the throat. Prices start at £260 for pearl drop earrings, £1,275 for a necklace.

Belinda Hadden and Amanda Nimmo have teamed up to produce equally ethereal and delicious necklaces. They float semi-precious stones on invisible thread, mixing pink and grey freshwater pearls, or pearls and stones such as white freshwater pearls and labradorite (all by mail order only at £96 plus £3.50 postage). Contact Heavenly Necklaces on 0171 786 3966. Kiki McDonough has built

her business on providing exactly the sort of pieces that women will buy for themselves: the chic little earrings of gold and silver (so useful, they can be worn with almost anything). She, too, has great ropes of amethysts or lotuses which have the authentic nonchalant look that this season requires.

Cox & Power uses not only semi-precious stones, such as the very sophisticated lozenge-shaped tourmaline and platinum necklace sketched here (£3,250), but also wonderfully sinuous slivers of silver or gold to make their "wave" bangles or flat hinged hoop earrings.

Much originality, too, is to be found at Jess James in London's Soho where extraordinary rings of three

colour gold form very attractive "wave" bands (from £350). He and the other designers whose work is on sale use stones in highly imaginative ways and there are some exceptionally attractive rings of gold with narrow enamelled bands and a single square-cut diamond (£320).

Susan Lennox works from home and so is able to offer some truly exceptional value. She uses pearls, semi-precious stones and old pieces of jade in an informal, yet highly decorative way. She floats grey Tahitian or South Sea pearls on a fine white or yellow gold chain (£1,500) while her great cluster of freshwater bubble pearls is made even more dramatic with its citrine centre clasp set in white gold -

at £1,200 wonderful value. Three solitaire diamonds (0.25 of a carat each) floating on the thinnest fishing wire imaginable so that the thread seems to disappear are £300.

Finally, there is Louise Sinclair, who has developed a niche in providing the sort of wearable, pretty jewellery that almost every woman would love to have for those days when she wants to be flattered rather than to make a statement. Her South Sea pearl drops with aquamarines and diamond pavé set collar earrings (£3,600) would be the perfect accompaniment to a classic string of pearls and she has a host of the sort of earrings that a working woman would be thrilled to put on in the morning and wear

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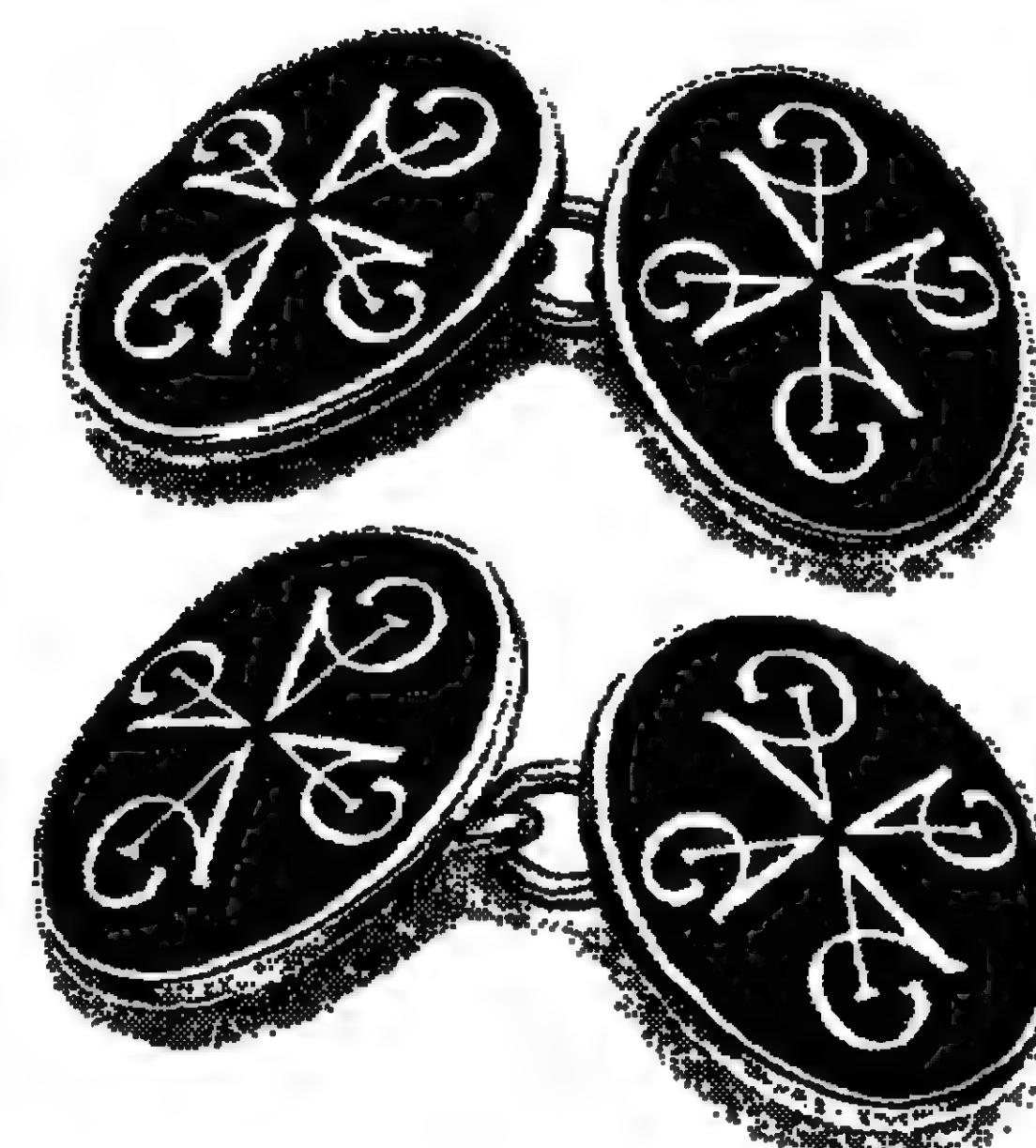
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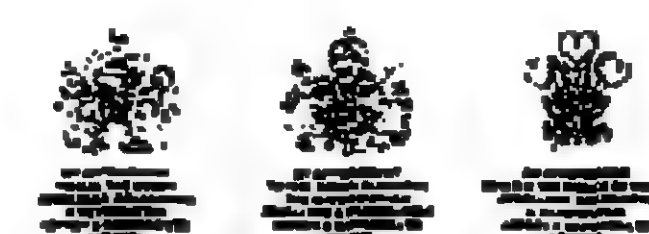
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HOW TO SPEND IT

Fashion

Designer links strengthen chain stores

Avril Groom reports that quality which is second to none can be found at everyday prices

Have you been seduced by designer labels in high street stores? Do you thrill to the promise of top-name quality at everyday prices? Or do you believe you only get what you pay for and prefer to buy designer clothes in a more personal environment?

Only a fashion Rip Van Winkle could be unaware of one of the British retailing success stories of the 1990s, a partnership between cash-rich multiples, hard-up young designers and eager customers in which everyone is a winner.

The stores benefit from fashion-literate customers who might otherwise never walk through their doors, the designers get a kick-start with public recognition and financial aid for their shows, thus further helping the process, and shoppers can enjoy designer labels they perhaps considered out of reach.

That is the theory. The practice has been more successful than stores or designers could have dreamed. As new designer/store links emerge, it is worth taking a critical look at these clothes to see if they have brought extra sophistication to the high street and if those who avoid them are missing out.

The answer on both counts is yes, provided you accept that these ranges are sold in less luxurious conditions than you might wish. Do not expect personal service or tissue-wrapped packaging; just think of that inoffensive price tag. There is another virtue - these designers realise that, at the price levels within which chain-stores must work, less is definitely more. So, although details characteristic of each designer are an important selling tool, they are subtle enough not to give away your preferences.

British women have long been comfortable with the idea of popping a Marks and Spencer T-shirt under a designer suit, so adding a chain-store suit to a designer shirt is not too great a step. Maybe grey is not really your colour, but as it is so much part of this winter's look you would like a little without any serious outlay? Go for Owen Gaster's brilliantly tailored suits for BHS.

Not convinced that long A-line skirts are here to stay? Then try Clements Ribeiro's version for Dorothy Perkins, in light but cosy felted wool, with trendy unfinished edges and smooth flat-stitched seams, so unassuming and well-cut it gives no hint of its humble origins or cost.

You need a Christmas party dress but are unwilling to splash out for occasional wearing? Ben de Lisi's rich and silky devoré velvet dress at Debenhams has the pizzazz without the price tag. Quality on all these pieces is second to none - a fact that can surprise designers as much as the first-time customer. "I was used to pleading with fabric manufacturers to let me buy," says Joely Davis of Joelyman, who has just designed a spring swimwear range for BHS. "The BHS name produced a far better welcome even when we asked for expensive fabrics."

An executive at clothing retailer Arcadia says "well-established British designers are surprised when they see the power of the big multiples to buy the best fabric at good prices, even when quantities are not great, and to source high-quality manufacturing. However highly thought of they are, the designers are minnows by comparison."

It was this power that enabled chain-stores to start designer link-ups in the early 1990s, partly as a response to young designers' complaints about the difficulties of obtaining backing in Britain. In countries such as Italy manu-

facturers fulfil this role but more than half of the British womenswear market is held by the multiples which became under moral pressure to help out.

In 1992, Marks and Spencer started funding fashion shows for "New Generation" designers. There was no pay-back for the store - more established designers such as Tanya Sarne, Betty Jackson and Marion Poole acted as consultants to M&S suppliers but with no in-store acknowledgment. This year, in response to the competition, M&S has finally let it be known that New Generation designer Julien Macdonald is responsible for a small range of crocheted-style knitwear, but his name is still nowhere to be seen.

In 1994, Debenhams (then part of the Burton group) introduced hats by Philip Treacy and casually glamorous evening wear from Ben de Lisi, but the big change was 1996's J range by Jasper Courran, who was already a consultant for the chain. With its own area, and quality that satisfied the designer's high standards and the store's budget, it was an overnight success and became a template for similar ventures. Since the launch of J. Courran's own-label business his design

A wide range of talent makes the enterprise fertile ground for anyone with even a passing interest in style

sense has grown in confidence and stature - his spring 1999 collection of pure, long shapes in subtle metallics or beading veiled in pale or smoky sheers was highly acclaimed.

Spearheaded by Arcadia, the concept has snowballed, with designers becoming more adventurous as stores push the limits in terms of both styling and price. Debenhams added high-drama tailoring from Pearce Fionda and bias-cut evening wear from Maria Grachvogel.

Principles has hit this season's sense of simple luxury head-on by hiring Amanda Wakeley, Britain's answer to Donna Karan. Dorothy Perkins snapped up highly-rated twosome Clements Ribeiro with their appropriately young and eclectic approach. BHS successfully stuck its neck out with two names initially barely known outside the industry - deceptively simple cutter Paul Frith and talented young tailor Owen Gaster.

Even teen favourite Top Shop has entered the fray with its TS Design range from an interesting trio - young clubber style Sherard Lamden of Seraph, It-girl favourite Tracey Boyd and acknowledged fashion intellect Hussein Chalayan.

This wide range of talent makes the whole enterprise fertile ground for anyone with even a passing interest in style. The stores are aiming to alter our perceptions of them and it would be churlish not to respond. For instance Top Shop, with Tracey Boyd's warm, soft fly-fronted grey wool coat with detachable plum fur collar, priced at £200, is plainly targeting a different customer from the usual schoolgirls and students (it claims a customer base aged from 12 to 35). The thirtysomething career woman to whom that well-made coat represents a

designer bargain rather than a huge aspiration will benefit, if she can lay aside her prejudices about entering Top Shop's noisy caverns.

If you have qualms about BHS, go to the Premier Collection, which is how the Frith and Gaster pieces are flagged. Gaster's suits, with their trademark cerise lining, look straightforward enough in plain marled light grey or charcoal pinstripes, but the quality, fit and cut are all exceptional.

The latter is far more designer than chain-store - a long, full-skirted frock-coat style has curved back seams like a morning coat while the pinstriped jacket, matched to typically wide slouchy trousers, is cleverly darted to create a diagonally striped panel to emphasise the female shape. And all this for £90-£110.

The stores want to make sure the clothes reflect the designers' work while the designers only want their names on clothes worthy of them. All have very full involvement, from sketch to quality control on production. A perfectionist such as Hussein Chalayan is keen to work with Top Shop "because it lets me extend my range into market areas distinct in style from my main collection" but would never accept less than top-quality jersey for his simple dresses and separates.

Owen Gaster sent his own cutters to explain his complex techniques to BHS's manufacturers, while Amanda Wakeley's own workshop cuts her patterns for Principles and inspects at every stage of production. "I told them from the beginning that if I couldn't approve the quality I would walk out," she says.

Happily she has been delighted, though her collection illustrates both the strengths and pitfalls of designer links. It is the most luxurious and sophisticated range so far. But it is so popular that whenever new stock arrives it is rushed from box to rails and so may not appear at its best until you take it home and care for it.

A spin-off is that the designers' expectations have helped raise standards all across the high street, including chains with no direct designer links. Richards is the latest to decide to up its style and quality. "We do not feel we need a 'name' designer at present but we are very aware of our clients' fast-rising knowledge of and expectation from fashion," says marketing manager Jeni Clements.

"We have a specialist design team for each area - knitwear, tailoring and so on - and quality experts attached to each one." The results are a big improvement - some of the sleekest fake fur trims around, plus crochet or beaded dresses and simple tailoring up to designer standard.

Clements does not rule out designer links. Wakeley is on a three-year contract at Principles. Gaster's small range is being doubled by BHS for spring. Top Shop is about to sign two more designers and Debenhams has adopted the same idea for menswear (John Richmond and Oswald Boateng) and home items. Arcadia's latest move takes a fresh direction - its new SU214 menswear chain has a small made-to-measure range by Savile Row tailor Richard James, entitled Suit. Using some of the same cloths as his bespoke range, prices are about £450, compared with his minimum of £1,400.

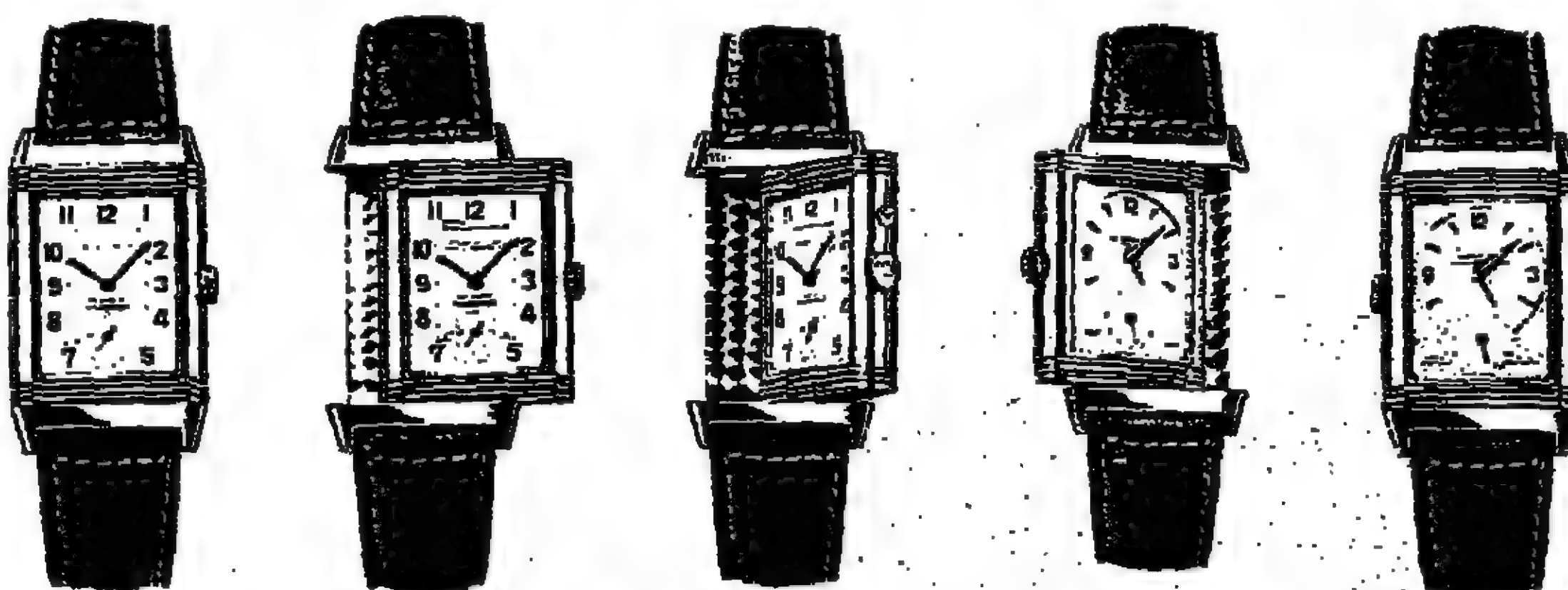
Any remaining stigma attached to chain-store shopping is fast evaporating. Most of us already half-recognise a designer provenance though we might not link it to the store name. Very soon we will and it will be seen as confirmation of our status as canny, thoughtful shoppers.



Clockwise from top left: Camel wool coat with fake fur collar, £120, by Paul Frith at BHS (tel 0171-292 3285). Grey wool flannel jacket with fur detail, £120, and long A-line skirt, £85, both by Clements Ribeiro for Dorothy Perkins at selected stores (tel 0171-291 2706). Purple stripe devoré velvet bias-cut dress, £180, by Ben de Lisi at Debenhams (tel 0171-408 4444). Satin shoes with diamanté ankle straps, £210, by Patrick Cox, 129 Soane Street, London SW1 (tel 0171-730 8899). Ivory alpaca coat, £285, and steel dress, £120, both by Amanda Wakeley at Principles (tel 0990 225343). "Mary Jane" shoes, £165, from Patrick Cox, as before. Red devoré velvet dress with fuchsia hem, £180, by Maria Grachvogel at Debenhams. Satin "Tango" shoes, £295, by Christian Louboutin, 28 Motcomb Street, London SW1 (tel 0171-823 2294). Photographer: Vicky Jackman. Stylist: Nicola Goldie at Mandy Cooley. Make-up and hair: Brita D at Mandy Cooley.

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FOOD AND DRINK

Slow Food just gets bigger for the little people

Nicholas Lander samples a food and drink event in Turin which offers a blueprint for artisan producers

Carlo Petrini, the charismatic 49-year-old chairman of the Slow Food Movement, was short of two things after the recent pinnacle of his organisation's success, a four-day event in *il Salone del Gusto*, the Hall of Taste, in Turin earlier this month.

The first was sleep. This was perhaps not too surprising given that more than 70,000 enthusiasts had embraced the opportunity to taste the work of 300 artisanal producers; to sample more than 2,300 wines from around the world and to listen to some of the world's greatest chefs and wine makers.

The second was a precise name for what he and his colleagues at Slow Food have created. The fact that Slow Food is a non-profit making organisation, ruled out the usual terms such as show, fair or conference. Something new and exciting has been created and Petrini has two years, until November 2000 when it will again be held in Turin, to find the right title.

The Slow Food Movement sprang out of aesthetic, ultimately successful, opposition to the opening of a McDonald's in Rome's magnificent Piazza Navona in the mid-1980s. Although opposing fast food in all its manifestations remains a priority, once Slow Food became a formal organisation in 1989 its leaders realised that, because it would never have the financial muscle to confront the fast food giants, it must move more skillfully.

Since then it has developed a highly visible merchandising arm based on its obvious icon, the snail; a publishing side which produces guides to wine, tradi-

tional restaurants, the food and cooking of individual regions, treatises on cheese, vinegar and cured meats and the importance of genetic bio-diversity and, most important, grassroots organisations around the world with a membership of more than 70,000 in 35 countries.

But for Petrini, the Slow Food movement has to exist to protect and to educate. "Taste is the highest expression of a nation," he explained, "yet in the history of mankind we have never spent so little time or money as a percentage of our income on food as we do today. We must preserve the umbilical cord between the farmer, the producer and the consumer and make today's young aware that good food comes from the land, not an industrial zone."

Slow Food initially secured the backing of the Piedmontese regional authority, the Parmesan cheese consortium, the Lavazza coffee company, which gave away 75,000 espressos during the fair, and Fidenza, which produces restaurant wear. Exhibitors paid a mere \$200 for a stand, and visitors \$6 for a day ticket.

The stands were occupied by farmers and producers rather than multinationals, agents or distributors. Perhaps because of that, they had an intimate, almost homely feel. Most were adorned either with photographs of their region or black and white photographs of how their farms used to look. One enterprising farmer hung scores of home cured salamis from an ancient ladder suspended horizontally from ropes. Behind one Parmesan stand more than 100 wheels of cheese, each a metre across, were stacked.

It would have been possible to spend all day in the market tast-



You have to be quick to grab a bite at the Slow Food Movement's gathering in Turin

Photograph: Francesco Berto/Montage: Philip Thompson

ing and buying cheeses, breads, salamis studded with truffles at £10 each, olives, olive oil and amusing foods such as those on the stand of Pasticceria del Capitano Rosso which makes sausages, bars of soap and even coffee pots out of excellent chocolate.

There were also special tasting halls for cheese, salami and wine, where you could try different combinations of food and be served a generous sample of the 2,300 wines on offer.

Taking place throughout the four days was a succession of heavily oversubscribed workshops attended by some 30,000 people. These provided not only a unique opportunity to learn but, crucially, covered the *salone's* organisational costs. For tickets ranging from £10 to £30 you could sit, taste and listen to world

experts such as Paul Pontalier from Chateau Margaux in France or Didier Lopez, from Barcelona, who prepared his special tapes, and, best of all, you could eat or drink what was on offer.

The most obvious omission was the absence of any British food or producers

On the final day there were workshops for more than 400 schoolchildren. Petrini wryly observed that keeping 30,000 talkative Italians quiet during these workshops was perhaps the

salone's greatest achievement.

What was also notable, in this era of the "superchef", was the presence of so many stars who showed a complete absence of ego. There were big names aplenty - chefs Alain Senderens from Lucas Carton, Paris, Stephanie Alexander from Australia and Spain's Ferman Adria, wine-makers Jacques Perrin and Gerald Chave from the Rhone and Tim Mondavi from California - but no individual book signings or celebrity gatherings. These stars were there not for themselves but to promote Slow Food.

They were able to do so without any silly behaviour or drunkenness among the visitors. The fact that so much good food was readily available - and that Italy is so blessed with products which are comfortably eaten standing with a glass of wine - were

important factors. Equally important, too, is the Mediterranean tradition of only drinking wine with food.

The most obvious omission from the *salone* was the absence of any British food or producers. The UK Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Food from Britain declined to participate and Britain was represented only by individual experts in the shape of wine writers Hugh Johnson, the FT's Jancis Robinson, (who also happens to be my wife), beer writer Michael Jackson and cheese expert Juliet Harbutt.

Harbutt's examples of British farmhouse cheeses was rapturously received. Even at the dinner that was organised, when there were stands of food from almost all over the world, Britain was conspicuous by its absence.

Petrini is adamant that the *salone*, or whatever it is retitled, will be a biannual event in Italy, but that it is a blueprint for the future, anywhere.

He added: "Our German association is planning something similar in Lubeck next April followed by Switzerland and Austria."

"We have proved that if you give people, particularly the young, the chance to see and to taste proper artisanal food they want more of it. Slow Food has a great future."

■ *Slow Food, Via della Mendicizia, Isernia, 14, 12042 Bra, Italy. Tel: +390172-115611, fax: +390172-212583, e-mail: international@slow-food.com. Net site: www.slow-food.com.*

■ *For British membership contact Wendy Fogarty: tel/fax: 0181-744 3297.*

Smell, slurp...and burp

Nicholas Woodsworth gets to the bottom of a good soup

Brittany has its lobsters and mussels. In the south-west, confit is king. In the pig is paramount. In Bresse, cocks crow the merits of local chickens from the top of barnyard dung-piles. In the bright constellation of French provincial cooking, every region, it seems, has its furred, feathered or finned star.

Every region, that is, except Provence. Its own unassuming contribution is the humble garden vegetable.

But when it comes to rich and flavourful cuisine, do Provencal cooks feel like poor relations? Do they trudge about their market-places hanging their heads? Not for a moment. As anyone who has strolled the streets of Apt, Cavillon, Carpentras or a dozen other Provencal market-towns knows, there is no shame in fresh produce.

I defy anyone to walk through the Tuesday morning market in Vaison-la-Romaine, my own favourite country market, and not come out with baskets laden and spirits rejuvenated. Vegetables dull, you say? I have only to look at a pile of gleaming, purple-black aubergines or small a pungent bunch of tomatoes to recall wonderful summer meals. Their fresh flavours are more than a match for the richest of regional cuisines.

But we all draw the line somewhere. My own line is

soups. Not long ago I made a tour through the Vaison market and, to my surprise, emerged with a rather skimpy basket. It was earlier this month, a cold, blustery day with the Mistral buffeting the stalls and the market vendors wrapped to the eyes in pullovers and scarves.

Where were the vast piles of bright sweet peppers, the string beans, the tomatoes, the *mange-tout's*? Most of my favourite local summer produce had disappeared. In their place were winter vegetables and root crops - onions and potatoes, beets and squashes, pumpkins, cabbages, carrots and leeks. "Allez, Monsieur, allez!", shouted a market trader standing behind mounds of onions. She looked chilled. "These are especially good for soup," she encouraged me, indicating the straw-coloured variety known as *oignon paille*.

I moved quickly on, but it was the same story at the next stand. "Ca fait une tres bonne soupe," said a man as he thumped a bright orange pumpkin.

Now, I can appreciate, in theory at least, the comforting quality of soup. But in my youth I was put off soup - all soup, any soup - by a boarding-school cook. Do not ask me what kind of soups he fuelled us with on cold winter days - so sour, thin and foul were they that they defied analysis. Suffice it to add that, over the years, the genius of Provencal cooking had done nothing to weaken my resistance.

It was with some trepidation, then, that a few days later I found myself caught up in a contest of a most threatening kind - the Vaison Country Soup Festival.

A popular annual event, like everything that has to do with food in France, it is propelled by a certain amount of ceremony, high purpose and style.

Presided over by the *Confrerie des Loucheurs*, or soup-ladders, the contest is a veritable marathon. Over 12 nights, 12 small villages in

'I had been asked, at the last minute, to join the jury as a taster'

the countryside surrounding Vaison each presents soups made by their best cooks.

After judicious sniffing, sipping and pontificating, a jury announces a winner and the tasting is then opened to the assembled public. The finalists go on to a grand finale held in Vaison where the overall victor, hung about the neck with a ceremonial soup-ladle, is invested as an honorary member in the *confrerie*. He or she is then whisked off for a week's holiday to one of France's great gastronomic regions, with all restaurant costs covered.

In this year's contest, 148

soups were entered. My mind reeled as I made my way to the Café de la Poste in my own village of Puymeras. There 12 of these soups, maternally swaddled by their makers in blankets and comforters against the cold, sat steaming in vast tureens.

In other years I had been absent during the soup festival. As a present-and-accounted-for village member of good standing, I felt compelled to show some spirit. What is more, as the sole member of Puymeras' foreign press corps, I had been asked, at the last minute, to join the jury as an honorary taster. There was no ducking out.

"Stir the soups! They must be kept stirred!" enjoined the mayor in final instructions as the bar-room was cleared, the doors were locked, and the jury members, one from each village, prepared spoons and bowls. The honour of the community was at stake.

Steeling myself, I threw a glance at the soup tureens nearest me. They did not look like the grey, dish-water soups of my youth - instead, thick and substantial, they were the rich colours of autumn itself - muted orange, russet, greeny-gold, bright yellow. And the odours that rose from them, I had to admit, were subtle and mysterious, full of intriguing promise.

I filled a cup and plunged my spoon into a smooth, mango-coloured purée. What was in there? Pumpkin, certainly, but what else? Cream? Nutmeg? A touch of bay leaf? It was light and lively. It was fortifying. It was delicious.

The next soup I tasted was thinner, more subtle, fawny in colour, and came with a slice of toasted wholemeal

bread. Courgette, I suspected. Identifying the constituent elements of soup was not my forte. But it, too, was delicious.

On I went, more and more eagerly. Each soup tasted better than the last. There were simple soups of little more than leeks and potatoes, complex soups incorporating whole slews of vegetables. I tried a squash soup thick with lentils and delicately perfumed with parsley. I sampled a dried-bean soup richly ornamented with garlic and cumin.

By the time the jury, after much deliberation and retasting, declared a winner - a pale-green *crème de brocoli au persil* - my taste-buds were in confusion. As the mayor made a speech of congratulation and the doors of the café were stormed by a ravenous public, I had to re-evaluate my position.

After years of admiring the cooks of Provence for their genius in creating lovely summer dishes, I finally had to admit that they did just as fine a job making winter soups as well. In a now-crowded café I chatted to villagers as they argued volubly over this tureen and that. Soup, they convinced me, is a good thing. It is filling, inexpensive, adaptable and - given the right *savoir-faire* - wonderfully tasty.

I left the Café de la Poste for home full of enthusiasm. After 12 bowls I was not about to begin a *souper* in my own kitchen that evening. Nor, even, the following evening. In spite of right security by apron-draped members of the *Confrerie des Loucheurs*, there were rumours of an unbelievably good chestnut soup the next evening in the village down the road. It was not to be missed.

We liked the wine so much we bought the chateau

WALTER & ALFRED GILBEY 1875

And they still own it. Ownership of Chateau Loundoune, one of the most attractive chateaux in Bordeaux, has been with the same company ever since and the ownership of Loundoune is in the hands of Charles Eve, Master of Wine, the quintessential Englishman (pictured right). Charles also runs the Chateau's Ecole du Vin when not listening to music or gardening.

Chateau Loundoune White 1997

Loundoune is one of the few chateaux in the Médoc to produce white wine. 12 hectares of mostly Sauvignon Blanc and some Semillon are carefully picked by hand, vinified and aged in oak barrels before blending and bottling. For the first time this century, the white wine harvest at Loundoune in 1997 started in August and an excellent vintage ensued. The 1997 wine is not only extremely fruity but is also full and has exceptional ripeness.

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FOOD AND DRINK

Cooking for Santa

Whale of a time at Christmas lunch

Kevin Pilley meets chef Ole Helmer, who's sitting on top of the world

Ole Helmer is at the top of his profession at the top of the world. He is the top chef on the world's largest island (not counting Australia). In fact, until recently he was the only chef in Greenland.

Twenty-eight-year-old Helmer, who studied catering at the Den Rose Oksa in Esbjerg before military duty in the Royal Danish Navy, has been head chef for the past four years at the Hotel Hans Egede, in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland.

One of his duties is to cook Father Christmas his traditional Christmas Day lunch. Two years ago he had to cook for 20 Santas who attended the first Santa Summit and Inaugural Santa Games. He also has to cook for the staff of Santa's Workshop and Post Office.

"One of my tasks is to prepare banquets and party buffets for functions held at the Café Rudolph. We get a lot of visitors to Santa's official home. It is where all the letters addressed to Santa Claus from around the

world end up and are answered. The man who used to be in charge was British. He liked a traditional turkey with all the trimmings. The locals prefer roast whale with stuffing."

Having been a chef in Copenhagen, Ole wanted something different - so he headed for the tundra. "The kitchen is the best place to work in Greenland. You are always warm and you are never too hot. It can get 30°C below outside. Our customers often arrive by snowmobile." Nuuk, in the south-west of Greenland, on the mouth of the Godthab Fjord, has 13,000 inhabitants. Greenland as a whole attracts about 8,000 tourists a year. The Hotel Hans Egede opened in 1987 and was named

after the missionary founder of Nuuk. It is the only hotel in a town which has one traffic light and one roundabout. There are now three other restaurants, including the world's most northerly Thai restaurant, the Chareon Por (Big Elephant), which is run by a Dane and his Thai wife.

Ole's menu is based on local fresh produce. His specialties include soufflé of scallops, fillet of reindeer and whale meat. "In such a remote place guests are open to trying something like *matlak*, raw whale skin which tastes like avocado. Whale steak is very popular. Everyone wants to try it no matter how environmentally friendly they pretend to be. It is the ethnic dish. "It tastes like liver and has its

texture. I cook dark and white meat served with boiled potatoes, grilled onion and a coriander gravy." The reindeer is served with squash or courgette, mush-

**Corned
Greenland
lamb with
horseradish
will set you
back £17**

rooms, parsley and cranberry sauce. The scallops come with a combined almond and white wine sauce and a lobster glaze. "Obvi-

ously, we are well off for fish here - halibut, cod, rose fish [Norwegian haddock] and even porpoise." Salmon comes from the Davis Straits. "I buy fresh from the quayside. My catch of the day could be wolf-fish, grenadier, ray, arctic char, narwhal, deep water prawns, ballan wrasse [sea salmon] or sand dab," says Helmer.

Prices are high since most vegetables and fruit have to be imported from Canada and Denmark - although some turnips are grown locally, weather permitting. Main courses include grilled trout with creamed fish sauce and peppers, squid, braised guinea fowl in champagne sauce, Thone steak with fried potatoes and a sauté of beans and

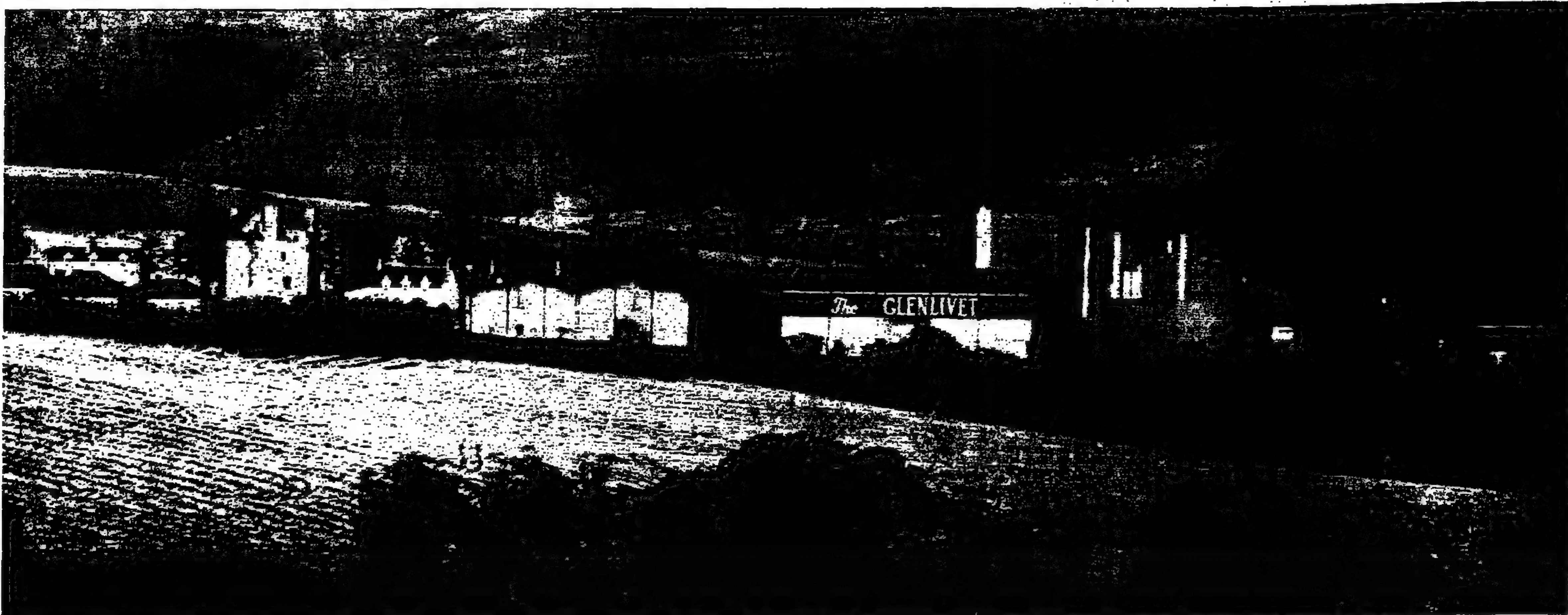
pimento, and tournedos of musk ox with pasta and parsley gravy. Corned Greenlandic lamb with horseradish will set you back £17. The wine list is dear too. A bottle of Vouvray costs about £30. Mumm Cordon Rouge in the region of £58 and a beer costs roughly £4 a bottle.

However, more chefs are beginning to be attracted to Greenland from Denmark, both by the high salaries and the local ingredients. Kim Hansen and Kasper Lindberg are the chefs at the Hotel Arctic in Ilulissat, which is two hours north of Nuuk - and the last restaurant before the North Pole. No particular cuisine or cooking style is allowed to dominate their menu. The hotel has become a popular away-from-

it-all conference venue. Says Hansen: "The ingredients and specialties are of course local but the way we cook them is inspired by a variety of cuisines. Everything is organic - fish from the sea, birds from the air and animals from the land." Specialties include saddle of reindeer, *pommes arctiques*, and port wine sauce with truffles and little ails. Arctic chefs also use a lot of indigenous herbs and berries such as lousewort, cowberry (mountain cranberry), mountain sorrel, scotch thyme and sea purslane.

Says Helmer: "There is a lot of latitude for invention in these latitudes. Greenland's *novelle cuisine* is 4,000 years old. You can drink a 12-year-old malt whisky with 12,000-year-old ice cubes."

Was he joking? He says: "Food is taken very seriously. Food gets priority over people on aircraft. You can lose your seat to some eggs quite easily. People need good food to function properly. Father Christmas couldn't cope on an empty stomach."



The Livet Valley used to teem with illicit distillers who had already carved out a reputation for their product before the 18th century had come to a close

Whisky

The genuine article

Giles MacDonogh ponders the reasons for The Glenlivet's pre-eminence

There are a lot of malt whiskies around which sport definite articles these days, giving themselves airs and high-sounding titles like "The MacTavish - 12 Years Old". On the other hand there is only one brew where the article is justified by tradition, and that is The Glenlivet.

It was not always so. The Livet Valley used to teem with illicit distillers who had already carved out a reputation for their product before the 18th century had come to a close.

The barley of Upper Banffshire was difficult to sell, and smallholders found it hard to compete with farmers from the fertile Scottish Lowlands. It was much easier to distill it. Long before small-scale distillation was legalised in 1823, smoke billowed out of the caves, burns and bottles of the valley: evidence of a thriving local industry.

The whisky they made was good. In 1822, a quarter of a century before the German Prince Albert gave the nod to the cult of all things Scottish - the High-

lands reminded him of Thuringian Gotha - King George IV arrived in Edinburgh wearing full Highland rig, and surprised his hosts by asking for The Glenlivet whisky. Its reputation had already travelled as far south as London, Windsor and Brighton.

Several reasons have been suggested for The Glenlivet's pre-eminence: the austere climate and high altitude of the valley; or the quality of the water in the burns. Possibly what made the malt so good was not so much the natural position, but the general lawlessness of the place.

No one, it seems, took much notice of the excisemen, and that meant the distillers could carry on their work in an unhurried way, making sure that the stuff

was properly made and free from the taints that would have been abundant in the other forms of moonshine on the market.

One of the advantages possessed of The Glenlivet men was their local magnate, the Duke of Gordon. He encouraged distilling in general, and George Smith in particular. It was Smith who founded the distillery we know today, taking up one of the new, cheap licences advocated by the duke in the House of Lords in 1824.

That distillery was at Upper Drumlin. Not much is left of it now, just a cairn of stones and a deserted house which may have been the home of the manager. In 1859 he moved a few hundred yards farther down the valley to

the less exposed spot of Mimmora. Anyone who has visited The Glenlivet outside the summer season, and hopped from foot to foot to keep warm, would soon understand why.

George Smith appears to have been a remarkable man. He was much hated by the amateur distillers, for the good reason that he ultimately put them out of business. He prudently travelled the land with a brace of pistols in his belt, while excisemen accompanied by soldiers gradually cleared the valley of competition.

Smith never bottled his own whisky. Some of it went into Usher's Old Vatted Glenlivet. Imitations were not slow in coming. One of John "Johnnie" Walker of Kilmarnock's first blends was

named "Glenlivet" (sic). In 1865 the Duke of Richmond and Gordon was called in to attest to the fact that Smith was the "only" distiller left in the valley.

As so many people wanted to market their whisky as The Glenlivet, a court case ensued. Smith's heirs eventually allowed 10 other distilleries to attach the word "Glenlivet" to their names, even if they were to be found as far away as Dufftown, Aberlour or Craigellachie. Smith's was the only one allowed to use it pure and simple of itself. It was the definite article.

The Glenlivet was the first "malt" whisky to enjoy a widespread reputation across the Atlantic. Since 1978 it has been owned by the Canadian giant,

Seagram, who have been successful with their classic, heathery 12-year-old, and more concentrated 18-year-old malts. Since then, they have extended the range to include a rather richer 15-year-old "Archive", which is imbued with a little more sherry character from the cask.

A new departure, however, is a series of vintage whiskies bottled at cask strength, and without the customary chill-filtering which can rob malt whisky of some of its taste. I tasted these up at the distillery in October. The Glenlivet is anxious to make it clear that whisky does not have good and bad vintages in the same way as wine. According to them, the only difference between one barley and another is yield. Yet

there are considerable variations between one cask and another, and this is highlighted by the selection.

The 1972, for example, has something of the elderflower scent which is present in the best Glenlivets; while both the 1970 and the 1969 were dominated by the sherry butts which nurtured them.

I preferred the 1968, which had a lovely smoky complexity, and the 1967, where that elderflower scent had matured into something richer, like the smell of cooked gooseberries.

Information: a pack containing a 20 cl bottle of all five vintages is available from Oddbins and specialist shops in a smart box for £169. The 1968 and 1970 vintages are also available in 70cl bottles, priced £35 and £39 respectively. You can win a 25cl bottle of The Glenlivet '89 simply by dropping a line with your name and address to: FT Glenlivet drive, Eagle House, 58 Blythe Road, London W14 0BA. The first card drawn out of a hat and mentioning this FT story gets the bottle. No purchase is necessary.

Appetisers

FT offer from the smokehouse

First, a food offer, from the cold waters off Skye and the moors of northern Scotland, just for FT readers. The first item is 2lb of the finest farmed smoked salmon - in a recent blind tasting it was mistaken for wild - prepared, sliced and interleaved by Dunkeld

Smoked Salmon, a small smokehouse on the banks of the River Tay which has a clientele from Scotland to Tokyo.

The second is a brace of smoked wild grouse which could make a distinctive first course for up to 12 people. This has been prepared by Rannoch Smokery,

on the shore of Loch Rannoch, Perthshire. Slice the breasts and they are ready to serve.

Goods and serving instructions will be packed in an insulated polystyrene box with dry ice inside a protective cardboard outer. The price is £39.50 for UK mainland addresses by 24-

hour tracking service; £54.50 to European Union member states on continental mainland Europe by 48-hour tracked delivery.

Orders to: Dunkeld Smoked Salmon, Springwells Smokehouse, Brae Street, Dunkeld, PH8 0BA. Tel: 01380-727839; fax: 01380-728760; e-mail: dunkeldwildsal@zetnet.co.uk.

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London's second Fine Wine Encounter is being held at the Landmark Hotel next weekend. Organised by the British magazine *Decanter*, it bears more than a passing resemblance to the New York Wine Experience organised by rival American magazine *Wine Spectator*. More than 80 producers, many of them world-famous, will pour and answer questions from the most assiduous wine bore. Advance tickets are available on 0181-774 0816 and cost £25 for one day, £45 for both.

Janis Robinson

Fine examples of Viognier made outside the grape's homeland, Condrieu in the Rhone, are thin on the ground. California can field the likes of Calera, Phelps and, quite creditably, Fetzer's most recent vintage, Les A. Sandeman of London SW10, W8 and SW13 have a couple of Italian examples which are superbly made.

The most convincing New World Condrieu to have come my way recently comes from Fairview in South Africa. The first 1998 vintage from these imported vines is well worth seeking out from Oddbins Fine Wine

at £7.49. It has real apricot scent and exuberant concentration. Total production was just 500 bottles. JR

It is Rhone time, time to warn the cockles with the seriously sturdy red made in that southern French valley. Two of the supermarkets' most characterful current offerings come from the vineyards around Hermit-

age. The top 85 Tesco stores should stock the impressive, classical 1994 Cornas from the well-respected Tain-l'Hermitage at £8.99 which could be drunk with pleasure over the next five years. Safeway's sumptuous Crozes Hermitage 1997, from Pochon under the name Domains Barret, for £8.99 may not last as long but is utterly seductive now. JR



Oysters with sour cream and red wine vinaigrette. One of the treats in the beautifully photographed 'Bliss Vine, Fast Fresh Food from Raymond Blanc' published this month by Headline at £20. The book's too big for a Christmas stocking, so try a pillowcase

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FOOD AND DRINK

Cookery

Good for the goose, and carver

Planning ahead can make what seems a complicated meal an easy one to serve, says Philippa Davenport

Last week I sang the cook's Christmas lament and suggested a recipe for small festive birds: there is no need to get up at crack of dawn to put them in the oven.

This week the plight of the carver has been brought to my attention. Too much of the Christmas holiday is spent wielding sharpening steels, plunging blades into hams, haunches and poultry.

Trying to prise enough meat from breasts, legs and wings can cause angst, particularly to carvers thoughtful enough to want to give everyone a slice of the cut he or she likes best.

Then there is the problem of getting the carved meat to table before it congeals. So's law seems to decree that as soon as the carver sits down to eat a few choice fragments, some of the party begin to whisper about second helpings.

Last week's recipe for quail was a carver's dream. No need to be on duty at all, as birds so small can be tackled direct by diners with a mixture of table cutlery and fingers.

This week's recipe is for goose, to satisfy families who prefer a larger, more traditional festive bird and find reassurance in the sight of the head of the household cutting and offering portions to those gathered round the table. This recipe is, however, almost as kind to the carver as were the quail.

Goose is a richly delicious bird but the meat on it is not designed to feed an extended family or large gathering. The traditional farmhouse solution was to roast goose with a rabbit or two slipped into the body cavity.

This play not only served to feed the goose, but it lubricated the lean and humble rabbit,

allowing it to absorb some of the bird's luscious flavour as it cooked. The outcome on farms was, unsurprisingly, that the men got more goose while maiden aunts and children were given the rabbit, a practice too politically incorrect to countenance today.

In my version, the ingredients are stuffed and wrapped, Russian doll fashion, in a boneless parcel. Boiling out makes room for more rabbit and more stuffing. It is a gift for the carver, who will be able to slice through the bird in record time.

It is democratically pleasing, allowing everyone around the table to get a fair share. And it is luscious eating, delicious served hot, although the stuffing tends to crumble and fall untidily from the slices, and excellent cold when it seems impossible not to carve it impeccably.

The workload the carver is spared has to fall somewhere, of course. That it falls on cook's shoulders comes as no surprise to many of us, but it is not as bad as it sounds. Boning out a goose sounds ghastly. In practice, the bigger the bird, the easier it is to bone. Goose is about as easy as you can get, but it does take time, so allow yourself plenty.

I suggest preparing the goose a couple of days ahead. The rabbits can be prepared then, too. But it is best to delay packing the parcel and stitching it up securely until Christmas Eve.

As for the cooking, think in terms of three hours. It will need slightly less but basting and turning the bird always adds on a little.

When it is done, let the cooked bird rest for 30 minutes, and give yourself a rest too, before letting the carver loose and waiting for someone to propose a toast to the cook.



Not just at Christmas: a wall painting from the tomb of Nebamun, a scribe under the Pharaoh Tutmosis IV, the 18th dynasty, shows slaves plucking geese.

Roast goose with rabbit, lemon and parsley stuffing

This recipe will serve 12 people

A plump fresh goose with an oven-ready weight of about 4.25 kg (not less than 4kg and not more than 4.5kg)
3 wild rabbits or 1 plump farmed rabbit (to yield 1.2 kg filleted meat)
the finely grated zest of 4 lemons plus 4 tablespoons lemon juice
80g chopped flat leaf parsley
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
350g fresh breadcrumbs
80g butter

Remove the fat from inside the tail and of the bird and render it down. Cut off the legs at the knuckle end of the drumsticks and cut off the wing pinions.

Lay the bird on its breast and cut through the skin and the flesh to the backbone from the person's nose to the neck. Then cut and scrape the flesh from the carcass with a small, sharp knife held close to the bone.

Free the fleshy "lozenges" carefully and work down each side of the bird, exposing the rib cage. When you get to the tip of the breast, cut through the cartilage. Cut through the wings where they join the carcass then pare the flesh free from the wing bones, working from the carcass towards the tips.

Free the leg meat in similar fashion, first cutting through the socket joints that attach the legs to the carcass, then scrape the meat clean from the thigh bones and drumsticks.

Strip the meat from the rabbit bones, keeping the chunks as large as possible. Weigh out the required amount for this recipe. Any extra can be poached and potted, or stir-fried and used to garnish lentil soup, pasta or a salad. Use the rabbit and goose bones, giblets, neck and other trimmings to make a rich stock that can be served as gravy.

To make the stuffing, first warm the butter with an equal weight of melted goose fat in a large pan. Away from the heat, add the lemon juice and zest, chopped herbs and breadcrumbs. Season generously and leave to become cold.

To assemble the parcel, lay the boned-out goose flesh side up on the work surface. Spread half the stuffing over the central breast area of the flesh. Put the rabbit fillets on top, seasoning them generously, and sprinkle the rest of the stuffing over and around the rabbit to fill the gaps and make an even mound.

Bring up the sides of the bird over the filling, as though wrapping a parcel. Aim for a plump pillow, but one that is not

too tightly packed as the stuffing will swell during roasting. Using fine string, firm stitches and a good overlap, sew the bird up from neck to tail end. Then saw it across the vent and at the neck. Push the leg and wing flesh into the body, like pockets, and saw down the folds.

Finally, check the skin for any nicks and tears and patch them tidily. Then weigh the stuffed bird so you can calculate cooking time.

The goose is now ready to roast or it can be covered loosely and stored in a cold larder or fridge overnight - but be sure to bring it back to normal room temperature 2 hours or so before you plan to begin cooking it.

Rub the skin of the goose all over with salt and pepper immediately before roasting. Lay the bird, breast down, on a rack in a roasting pan and drape it with a double thickness of butter-muslin soaked in melted goose fat. Roast at 220°C (425°F) gas mark 7 for 15 minutes, then at 180°C (350°F) gas mark 4 for 1 hour 20 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes depending on whether the weight of the stuffed bird was a little under or over 4.5 kg.

Check periodically that the butter-muslin is moist, and pour off the surplus fat from the tin (saving it for later treats, of course).

Turn the bird breast up and continue roasting, still at 180°C (350°F) gas mark 4 and still cloaked in fat-soaked butter-muslin, for 45 minutes. Then remove the butter-muslin drapes and pour off all the fat that has collected in the roasting pan.

Turn the temperature up to 220°C (425°F) gas mark 7 and fast-roast for 15 minutes to crisp the breast skin a little.

If the goose is to be served hot, let it rest for 30 minutes before carving.

Floury potatoes, clear gravy, fried dessert apples and mildly spiced red cabbage make good accompaniments.

Pubs

Market forces brew up a ferment

Peter Millar mourns the passing of a family firm in Oxfordshire

In The Brewery Gate, formerly The Marlborough Arms, tucked away by the castle ruins in Oxford's most ancient and least visited corner, the barman is checking the clarity of a sample glass of bitter.

"Mind you, it'll be one of the last too,"

After more than two centuries, Morrells, the last surviving brewery in a city where once every college brewed its own ale, is ceasing production this month, the victim, according to its executors, of market forces.

Upstairs in offices in the red-brick Victorian building, Paul Beadle, newly-appointed chief executive of Morrells of Oxford, the company formed to run the 148 pubs following the sale last month of the brewery, has an undertaker's attitude towards its death.

"It's sad. Of course it is," Pressed, he will even admit that the loss of Morrells ales is a "tragedy" for traditional brewing, nowadays one of the most fragile elements in Oxford's heritage.

"But it's market forces," he insists. "Market forces," are Beadle's mantra.

In his eyes, the brewery site, a rare piece of prime real estate in central Oxford,

is ripe for redevelopment. He is delighted to have received a letter from English Heritage informing him that the buildings will not be listed.

When I suggest that Whitbread, one of the ogres of the brewing industry so far as most real ale fans are concerned, behaved better by allowing a management buy-out of the Castle Eden brewery last month, he is dismissive.

The Castle Eden deal won praise even from Camra (the Campaign for Real Ale) which expressed the hope that Michael Cannon, the American businessman who is chief shareholder in the new Morrells company, would follow suit.

Beadle in his striped shirt and flowery tie smiles: "I'm not here to please Camra. I'm in here to show a return." From a purely business point of view, he is probably right. If Morrells raises a moral dilemma, it is not one that causes Beadle much angst.

He vehemently denies the charge of asset-stripping, stressing the new company's commitments to the pubs, side-stepping the suggestion that the brewery itself is an asset he is eager to strip. With an expression of regret Beadle blames it all on the Beer Orders. Correctly.

Lord Young's woefully misconstrued attempt to reduce the giant brewers' dominance of the British market by limiting the number of pubs they could own instituted an unprecedented separation of brewing and retail operations.

The result has been that the "big boys" - Scottish Courage, Bass, Whitbread and Allied-Domecq - can offer the new "pub chains" volume discounts. They thereby undercut the smaller, traditional brewers with their chain of tied houses.

Beadle smiles ruefully as he prophesies a bleak future: "I can see a number of smaller brewers going the same way," with a gesture



indicating "down the plug-hole."

Pressed to name names, he suggests I look no further than Devizes, the Wiltshire base of Wadworths, a brewer most English beer-lovers would have considered an exemplary survivor.

Indeed, the only gratifying thing about the Beadle attitude is that it isn't necessarily so. While a worrying number of traditional British brewers are bought up and

closed down by their larger rivals every year, new start-ups can still be successful.

One of the prime examples is the Black Sheep brewery in Masham, Yorkshire, run by Paul Theakston, son of one of the county's most famous brewing families.

When Scottish Courage bought up Theakston's and transferred most of the brewing business to its vast Tyneside plant, Paul was dismissed.

Banned by the takeover terms from using the family name, he bought the maltings next door to the old brewery, scoured the country for original equipment and set up Black Sheep "of the family", which has proved a cult success.

Discerning ale drinkers now seek out Paul's beers, where the Theakston name is evident only in his signature on a corner of the bottle label. In north Oxfordshire, the Hook Norton brewery, much smaller than Morrells and operating out of premises little changed in a century, celebrates its 150th birthday next year, is still run by the founder's family.

Until last month, the Morrells pedigree was even older. The family was one of the few survivors of the original 18th century "beverage". On the wall in The Brewery Gate hangs a photograph of the clan in their late Victorian prime: all taffeta and crinolines, wing collars and stiff upper lips.

The decision to close the

brewery met with resistance, according to Beadle, from "a small pocket of the family. But they were the ones that were running it. The rest realised that the business was making a loss and we offered them the cleanest way out". The new Morrells, he says, is out to make a profit. What shall it profit a man...I muse, but decide to save my breath.

Most of the Morrells pubs, he insists, are in for big investment. Apart from The Brewery Gate next door, all are in the hands of tenants. That will change, although he denies plans to put in managers throughout.

"I believe there is a third way: a sort of franchising deal. In the end what we want is bloody good pubs." Which sounds great, except that with a vocabulary dominated by phrases such as "modern day retail operation", "focus on major brands" and "proven food operation", Beadle's marketing speak overrides every other utterance.

Morrells pubs will continue to sell Morrells ales, but they will be brewed elsewhere, to the same recipe. But then any ale drinker knows that recipes alone do not really work, that beers brewed with different water in different vessels are, in the end - as Paul Theakston proved - different beers.

The workforce is resigned - even those who are staying. Head brewer Dave Polden, a genial big man with a shock of white hair who has worked at Morrells for 24 years, heaves a sigh as he looks at his doomed realm of gleaming coppers, one at least a century old.

In the gathering twilight next to the big iron gates with the gold lions standing proudly on either side, old John who is past retirement age but comes in for a couple of hours each evening "just to help lock up", shakes his head sadly.

"I don't know what the world's coming to. Him there," he gestures at the departing back of the new chief executive, "Beadle - can't remember his other name, we call him Jeremy - says it's all about profit. That's all they care about these days, isn't it? But it's not everything, you know."

Too right, John. Too right.

Eating out

Another star is born

Giles MacDonogh thinks Aubergine's William Drabble will soon join the ranks of elite chefs

In spite of the Cassandra prophesying gloom and doom, London's restaurant world continues to spin in an unmelodious game of musical chairs. Chefs move on, others arrive to take their places, new restaurants open; everything is in flux. A few weeks ago Gordon Ramsay left Aubergine to open his own restaurant in Chelsea. The move cannot have much pleased his former employers A-Z, but the company has been busy in the meantime and cracked down a new man, William Drabble.

Drabble has come from Michael's Nook, in Grasmere in the Lake District: a corner of England which has enjoyed a reputation for good food for decades. At 27 he was granted his first Michelin star. Before going to the Lake District he worked for some

of London's best chefs: Philip Britten at the Capital, Nico Ladenis at Nico Central and Tom Aikens at Pied à Terre.

They all left their mark: Britten taught him to shop, he says; Ladenis introduced him to fish; and Aikens communicated the love of "tall food" which he carries with him to this day.

Somehow he missed out on French work experience, and slightly regrets it now. Aikens was another pupil of the great Parisian restaurateur Robuchon, and some of the Frenchman's thinking has rubbed off on Drabble.

I was apprehensive, for example, to see another bowl of frothy truffle-scented beans appear before me as an *amuse guiche*, knowing that a similar "cappuccino" had been the stock-in-trade of the last incum-

bent at Aubergine. Drabble, however, stuck closer to the original idea. His was thickened with foie gras, was denser and more aromatic than Ramsay's. It was a pleasant surprise.

Foie gras is always a test of a chef. Drabble passed with flying colours. His terrine was layers of foie gras interspersed with potted duck meat and sweetbreads. My guest, a magistrate, sat in judgment over a plate of salt cod *brandade* on a watercress sauce, topped with a fan-shaped arrangement of smoked eel and scallops. Her verdict was enthusiastic. The rather prosaic menu descriptions had not led either of us to expect anything so well conceived.

With the main courses came "tall food". This has great visual appeal, of course, but is made a nonsense in the eating, as the

diner must dismantle the elaborate structure in order to get it into his mouth.

My judicial friend had veal sweetbreads on top of a wonderful *pomme fondante* with a cep casserole surrounded by what tasted like a red-wine *meurette* sauce enriched with caramelised onions. I liked mine even more: the legs and breasts of a Bresse pigeon on top of some crispy potatoes, resting on some *celeriac* which, in its turn, was laid on top of a bed of preserved cabbage. The whole dish was bathed in a delicious madeira, truffle and meat juice reduction.

There were many things which could have been better described. That cabbage was allegedly "confit", thus provoking a lively discussion with the *maitre d'hôtel*. How had it been preserved? Had it been pickled? I

asked. It turned out that it had been stored in rather salty fat like a goose, but it was none the worse for that.

A bottle of 1992 Volnay Clos d'Audignac from Domaine de la Pousse d'Or stood up to both dishes.

The wine list was as rich as the food with a good number of pudding wines available by the glass, including 1998 Chateau d'Yquem at a suitably impressive price. There aren't many bargains there. A new list is on its way, "with more new world wines", says the *sommelier*.

Cheese is an option on the dessert list, but there is no trolley. This is a mistake I think. In a restaurant this good a well-kept cheese board is conspicuous by its absence.

The puddings did their level best to make up for the lack of



William Drabble: superb cooking throughout the meal

cheese. A little forest cake came with a mini *crème brûlée*. My friend's lemon tart had a super acid tang, and excellent pastry while I had some figs cooked in red wine with a spicy *savarin* and a cinnamon ice. Better than both was the *tarte Tatin*, the apples turned to toffee in their caramelisation.

Drabble's cooking was superb

throughout and he looks like becoming one of the stars of the frenzied London scene. Let us hope for our sake - and his - that economic prosperity lasts.

■ Aubergine, 11 Park Walk, London SW10 0AJ. Tel: 011-853 3449, fax 351 1770. Menu £23.50 (lunch only) and £39.50 before service or wine.

PROPERTY / OUTDOORS



Blisworth Mill: planning permission has been granted for 22 two-bedroom apartments from about £100,000

Grist to the mill

Peter Whitehead reports on a canalside building set to be redeveloped

The canal and I go way back. Boys growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in the Northamptonshire village of Blisworth believed the Grand Union Canal – a friend to no one but a population of rats and the occasional narrow-boat holidaymaker – existed purely for their enjoyment.

This highway turned backwater was, and remains, the colour of grim grey-brown wet pavements on even the brightest day. But to a schoolboy, the towpath, the bridges, the locks and the overflow sluices were a shimmering adventure playground.

Some paid a high price for the fascination we all held. One primary school pupil in the year above me drowned. It left a generation with a dread fear and healthy respect for what might lurk

in the impenetrable depths.

On one occasion, that dread turned to panic as a schoolboy rafting expedition on the canal started to go under. The old oil drums we had used as floats began to fill with water; the crew made it to safety.

On another occasion it heightened the mystery of a ride hitched on a boat through Blisworth Tunnel to Stoke Bruerne, a mile and a half of darkness away.

I continue to visit the canal to this day – my parents still live in the house in which I grew up, a few hundred yards from the waterway.

On family visits, I take my daughters, aged six and four, to feed bread to the ducks from the towpath and find that little has changed. The village, through which lorries used to thunder, is now bypassed and quieter

but the canalside was always a world apart.

But change is about to visit a significant building known locally as Blisworth Mill, although it is many years since it was used as such.

Many childhood adventures were played out in front of the severe backdrop of this red-brick monolith, one side of which plunges directly into the canal.

The mill was built in 1879 by Blisworth-born Joseph Westley to grind corn for his bakery. In 1921, it was acquired by Northampton Co-operative Society and remained in production for another eight years.

I remember it as a bottle factory – though was never quite sure what that entailed – after which it became a British Pepper and Spice storage depot. For the past decade or more this Grade II

Listed building has been left empty, a few windows have been smashed and even the dying ivy growing up its walls appears to have given up hope of it ever buzzing with life again.

A future as a hive of industry was never really likely, and, inevitably, a residential developer has at last taken the plunge and is restoring and converting the mill into apartments – a perfect example of rural brown-field development.

Gladdale Homes has planning permission for 22 two-bedroom, two-bathroom homes in a variety of designs averaging 850 sq ft. It is also creating two three-bedroom semi-detached houses on the adjoining Pickford Wharf.

Prices are likely to start at about £100,000. Selling agent Aitchisons in Northampton (01604-621836) hopes to have

a ground-floor show apartment and sales office open in the five-storey landmark building before Christmas.

Work started at the site this week and the conversion is expected to be complete by September next year.

Aitchisons director Mark Pedley sees the restoration work as the culmination of a long-standing involvement with the mill which began when he went to live in Blisworth.

"It started at the acquisition stage and went right on through planning, and to the marketing. It is wonderful to know the building is going to be restored to something of its former glory," he said. There have already been a number of inquiries from potential buyers. Had I the money, I might invest in one myself. Or perhaps it's all a bit too close to home.

Fishing

Competing lures on honeymoon

Tom Fort feels the pull of the water in Seville

I have heard of brave or foolhardy men who have taken a fishing rod on their honeymoon; and of one or two, even, who managed something rather remarkable with it.

But I am not made of that temper of steel myself, and in general it's not a course of action I would recommend to newly-wed anglers wishing to continue with the sport.

However, lacking the apparatus does not mean the thought of it never crosses one's mind. I own that it did cross mine during our fortnight in Spain. Several times in fact; just as a matter of interest, you would not have known.

Having goggled at the wonders of the Alcázar in Seville, we sauntered off into the glorious gardens behind. I had read in the guidebook of a pool which had been created in the 18th century for King Philip V. He, apparently, was locked away in Seville for two years – a period spent fishing and preparing for death by means of "spiritual flagellation", of which I shall say no more than that the first sounds rather more congenial than the second.

We passed by the soaring date palms and eucalyptus trees, dappled in the myrtle maze, sniffed the tumbling jasmine, and came upon a pool presided over by a statue of Mercury. Whether this was the spot where poor Philip sought solace, I know not. But it was the spot I would have chosen, for it was stuffed with fat carp, circling Mercury with fine dignity.

Oddly enough, there was no visible prohibition on fishing for them. Had it not been for the 10,000 tourists and, of course, the fact that I was on honeymoon, I might have been tempted.

In Granada, I searched fruitlessly for any hint that the Nasrid rulers who built the Alhambra had had any interest in the potential of the dashing little stream which sparkled at the foot of their hill. I fear that – "shame", I hear you say, keeping the Christians at bay, trying around and the fountains and patios of the Generalife, and amusing themselves in the harem – they probably didn't.

There were some goldfish in a pool within the Sereglia, but no one could seriously consider hunting goldfish for sport.

Were they carp or barbel? I sensed my curiosity was not shared.

So it was in Cordoba that I felt the pull of water most strongly. Those who know the city will recall that the great Guadalquivir flows past the walls of the fabulous Mezquita. They may have walked across the Roman bridge which spans it to have a look at the sturdy Moorish tower on the far side. Their glance may have rested briefly on the line of ruined mills downstream, and at the giant mill wheel placed on one bank as a reminder of times past.

But, unless they were moved by the same spirit, I doubt if they would have devoted the time I did – and perhaps my beloved, until she wearied of it – giving up the possibilities.

Initially the interest was fairly idle, for I found it hard to believe anything, much could be going on in

water the colour of mushroom soup.

Then, as we leaned on the bridge wall and looked down, we saw something as exciting to me as the decorative work of the craftsmen in the mosque. Fish were feeding in the broken water, and decent ones, too. Were they carp or barbel, I wondered out loud, or some unfamiliar Spanish species? I sensed my curiosity was not entirely shared.

On the downstream side of the bridge was a big pool where there were swarms of splashes and other exciting signs of life. Below that, on the city side, was an overgrown island whose trees swayed and squawked with a multitude of roosting egrets.

Spread across the river from there was a succession of tempting little streams, created to drive the mill wheels which helped to feed Cordoba in those olden times (Isabella, she of the faith and the Inquisition, is said to have ordered their dismantling because their grinding kept her awake).

I walked along the bank to the nearest mill, and picked my way through the malodorous rubbish piled up in its basement. Emerging beside its stream, I found myself in a spot to excite any angler's eye. The water rushed into a rippling pool, creating delicious eddies. There were little splashes where little fish fed, and dark holes where big fish must lie. And nowhere was a fisherman to be seen.

What a missed opportunity, I thought as I hurried to rejoin Mrs Fort.

Now, what is Spanish for "fishing tackle shop" and "worms"? Our phrase book was useless. I shall have to find out.

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OUTDOORS

When Lawrence of Arabia took to the water

High-speed boats, as Richard Donkin discovers, owe much to the unsung work of 'Aircraftman Shaw'

On the road winding towards the seafront at Hythe I passed a vintage motorcycling enthusiast straddling a well-polished machine that must have been made during the inter-war years. The rider, wearing goggles, greatcoat and large leather gauntlets, might not have cut quite the dash of Aircraftman Shaw - better known as Lawrence of Arabia - who sped through these very lanes 70 years earlier, but his presence did help to recapture the earlier part of the century a little.

A few minutes later and the journey back through time was complete. There, in Hythe Marina, was a fully restored example of one of the RAF speedboats that inspired powerboat designs to the present day. Standing on board RAF 206 was Harry Banks, its former coxswain who had tested the boat during the 1930s with Aircraftman Shaw.

"He used to ride his bike, a Brough Superior, at high speed almost everywhere he went. He mixed a special fuel for it in the boatyard," said Banks, now 95. "I remember filling the bike's tank with fuel the evening before he died."

Biographies of T.E. Lawrence have understandably focused on his leadership of the Arab revolt during the first world war. His decision to spend his post-war years in comparative obscurity in low-ranking service duties tended to deflect attention from his work.

He was far from inactive during the inter-war years. Nor did he concentrate wholly on his

Gardening

Time to hack away the jungle

Frosted plants may look photogenic but, says Robin Lane Fox, reality is somewhat different

One answer to the late November garden is to abandon it and wait for the spring. It is an expensive answer and one which ignores the singular pleasure to be gained from favourable hours on exceptional winter days. Artists have often preferred trees without leaves and the clarity of line which comes with the loss of greenery. It can be surprisingly pleasant to work on into late afternoon with dusk and rain in the air and the evening call of a pheasant for company.

On a simpler level, which jobs are effective when preparing gardens for the quiet season?

We all favour pots outdoors for spring bulbs and romantic summer planting. My first advice applies whether you live in town or country. Raise the pots off any hard surface by slipping bricks underneath to support their sides while allowing free drainage through the bottom hole. In cold weather a frost will ice the damp bottoms of unraised pots on to gravel or a hard surface. Often they will crack away at the base when the cold spell thaws. If you raise them, you save them from bottom freezing and stand a much better chance of bringing a cheap pot through the winter.

We all face the same question in our flowerbeds: to cut down or not? Photographers, flower-arrangers and refined eyes now tend to say no because they value the patterns of winter light, frost and subdued browns on the dead stems of their winter borders. They photograph the best, and pass around their artistic pictures of their dying ornamental grasses at their sun-kissed best. On most days these photographs are irrelevant. Dark

The usual run of border plants look blackened, sodden and miserable

cutters for the task. They are far quicker at it than the usual scissor and will cope with anything which is not too thick and woody.

Perhaps we say too little about what should not be cut. Leave anything herbaceous which has not lost its leaves and anything which you believed to be only slightly hardy. Penstemons are a good example of plants which should be left as the top growth helps to protect them from frost. All the old friends like phlox, hardy geraniums, catmint, and campanulas should be cut down without a qualm.

Shrubs, of course, should be exempted. Last winter, I watched the sad sight of a London businessman in gloves, cutting down his hydrangeas and the browned

outlines of shrubby potentillas as part of his weekend filling of a black dustbin liner. Potentillas look misleadingly dead, even when you break their stems, but they should certainly not be clipped back. Nor should hydrangeas until late spring, if at all.

The lovely blue ceratostigma, often called hardy plumbago, should also be left with skeletal brown stems until April. Never go wild and cut a lavender down to ground level as part of a riot with the shears.

Photographers are welcome to their frosty grasses, but I assure you that a border fully cut flat by mid-December is extremely good for morale.

When the ground is cleared, you can also think about the urgent matter of manure on any ground which is now bare and waiting for vegetables or next year's flowers.

Books always call manure "well rotted", but as any horse-owner or country-dweller knows, rotted manure is extremely difficult to find in today's pattern of farm management. Usually, the best on offer has decomposed for only a few months and is still full of long straw.

In late November, strawed manure is not such a disaster. If the ground has been broken up, worms and bacteria will help to decompose a top dressing of long straw manure, applied in the weeks before Christmas. The one cardinal error is to imitate the last man who ever helped me in the garden while wishing that he was at home exercising his pet rabbits. He felt pleased to have begged a large load of strawed manure from a passing farmer in late March when I was away for the day.

He laid it all through the border as a mulch, where-



Harry Banks on board RAF 206. T.E. Lawrence rode his bike at high speed almost everywhere he went and mixed a special fuel for it in the boatyard

Philippe Fatio

attention to beating speed records on water. Lawrence was seconded by the RAF early in 1931 to work at Scott-Paine's British Powerboat Company in Hythe which had begun working on military adaptations of a revolutionary speedboat design. The design used a hard-chine planing hull - a flat bottom that helped the boat's structure rise above the waves and plane across the water, cutting down surface friction.

Lawrence had arrived at the boatyard unannounced, using the name that some believe he adopted because of his closeness to George Bernard Shaw's wife Charlotte, whom he regarded as a mother figure.

"We had no idea who he was at first. He came with this corporal who acted like a minder and it

was only when we complained about Shaw giving out orders that we discovered his real name," said Banks. "He didn't speak much but when he did, he

His post-war decision to avoid the limelight has obscured his key role

seemed to know what he was talking about."

This much is clear in the detailed notes Lawrence made about the first of the RAF rescue boats; they demonstrate an

in-depth technical knowledge of marine engineering and performance. His excitement comes across in a letter to Robert Graves written three months before his death. Lawrence wrote: "I have been so curiously fortunate as to share in a little revolution we have made in boat design... Now I do not claim to have made these boats. They have grown out of the joint experience, skill and imaginations of many men. But I can (secretly) feel that they owe to me their opportunity and their acceptance."

By this time, Lawrence had begun work on a private project with Edward Spurr, a Southampton boat designer, to construct a speedboat called Empire Day with which it was planned to attack the world water speed

record. The boat was built in the late 1930s but never made the attempt.

Scott-Paine also developed a larger high-speed launch - the 100 series - the last surviving example of which has also been acquired and restored by Claburn and a group of like-minded enthusiasts. Claburn runs the boats in corporate hospitality events and maritime shows under the Military Power Boat Trust, an organisation set up to promote the acquisition and restoration of similar vessels.

"I feel it is important to keep them and run them. There are not many left. Some examples of the early ones are being used as houseboats but, in a few years, unless we can find them and save them, they will be gone," said Claburn.

"These boats were ahead of their time. Put one against a modern Sunseeker and it would wipe the floor with it."

An even faster craft, capable of 50 knots built by Scott-Paine in 1939, was rejected by the Admiralty because it exceeded their specifications. This was the design he took to the US and which became the PT boat.

In spite of this military fickleness, the RAF boats saw service in hundreds of wartime rescue missions. "Some 13,000 men were picked up by boats like this. That's a lot of pilots," said Claburn. Enough, perhaps, to concede that the exceptional qualities of T.E. Lawrence continued to flourish far beyond his Arabian campaign.

Power Boat Restorations. Tel: +44 1590 61254

Seeing the wood for the trees

Anne Wareham takes nature to task

The best thing to happen to our garden this year was the removal of a telegraph pole. This was exciting because it was the last on a list of several obstacles that needed to go in order to effect a magical transformation.

The others we had removed, more controversially, were trees. I'm afraid these were perfectly good trees, doing no-one any harm. But they did ruin one of the most delightful features of the garden, a magnificent semicircle of mature trees which surrounded the south side.

This lovely backdrop tended not to be admired or noticed. It creates a strong horizontal line, but when we first came to live here several large trees within the garden broke it up.

They went first. Then three trees within the semicircle went because they had all developed an unfortunate drunken lurch; the odd angles of their trunks created a distracting pattern among the others.

Finally, the telegraph pole went. This was vertical enough, but too much in the foreground. With its removal the whole space opened up. This year, for the first time, visitors have commented on the way the line of trees enfolds the garden.

I am aware that this will rub salt into the wounds of those who have tree preservation orders to contend with.

But it is not only trees that can create dramatic lines. For several weeks this summer I repeatedly noticed a large horizontal spread of purple sage, which had come well through the winter and was looking splendid. There were several bronze fennels growing at its edges, which made a good colour combination. But one day I acknowledged that I found this group irritating because the vertical line of the fennel

ruined the broad flat sweep of the sage.

I felt the same reluctance I had felt about the trees - it seems hard to weed out a perfectly healthy, thriving plant. But the deed once done produced immediate gratification.

It appears to me that nature often gets her lines wrong. Natural effects are held in high esteem in theory, and the classic example is held to be the bluebell wood in spring. I have noticed, however, that nature will frequently spoil her handiwork by allowing one piece of bramble to reach stately for the sky, and

thus with one wave ruining the view of a total carpet of flowers. Likewise, I have to weed seedling elders and hollies out of the cover of ivy in the wood because their vertical line ruins the otherwise pleasing uninterrupted horizontal.

So now that I am aware of the joys of removal, I periodically venture into the garden with a pair of loppers in one hand and secateurs in the other. I'm looking for lines.

Outright removal isn't always the key; sometimes a bit of sculpting has the desired effect

thus with one wave ruining the view of a total carpet of flowers. Likewise, I have to weed seedling elders and hollies out of the cover of ivy in the wood because their vertical line ruins the otherwise pleasing uninterrupted horizontal.

So now that I am aware of the joys of removal, I periodically venture into the garden with a pair of loppers in one hand and secateurs in the other. I'm looking for lines. Outright removal isn't always the key; sometimes a bit of sculpting has the desired effect. Following a hint on these pages many years ago, I hid our neighbour's house with a line of laurels, which have grown lustily, as predicted. In their case, I have removed parts of their lower extremities. I resented the space they took up at ground

level, so conceived the idea of allowing them to hedge out at the back, while at the front I cleaned their trunks of all the small branches and leaves which came forward of this hedge line.

I worked up to about head height, where I allow them to branch out, like small trees. This cutting has produced a most satisfying line of sinuous trunks, a pleasing feature in their own right all year round. This is a good trick, too, for making space where a shrub has been planted too close to a path.

Creating a few trunks at the edge of the path, and allowing them to branch out into an elegant arch overhead, is much more satisfactory than hacking the shrub right back. Pruning a shrub this way can turn it into a small tree useful where space forbids a tree, or where more space on the ground is needed for planting. I made a pretty tree out of a cut-leaved elder, exposing a ruggedly attractive bark in the process.

But this process can become addictive. You may suddenly find yourself trunk crazy, and prout around everywhere looking for elegant shapes to expose. It is as well to bear in mind that it can be easier to chop a branch off than to put it back, before you do the deed.

But it is an addiction which will allow you to appreciate the beauty good lines can create in a garden. Lollipop trees rising cleanly away from the stark horizontal of a clipped hedge, the anarchic twigginess of the inside of a hornbeam tunnel, a line of stunted pollards.

One of the least satisfying pleasures of the gardening year is the stripping away of all the flowery debris in the autumn to expose the bones of the garden beneath, creating a fresh new vision - providing you have done your lines.



Outdoor pots should be raised off a hard surface

upon it turned hard in the next four weeks of spring drought. Eventually, the bacteria dealt with the straw in time for winter, but its decomposition took nitrogen and goodness out of the soil and was both a visual and a chemical catastrophe.

The maxim for muck is as follows. Long straw manure is for top dressing or to be dug in only before early winter. Thereafter, you need rotted manure without long straw if you know where to find it.

In towns, big loads of manure are a rare option. You are most likely to be offered bags of the stuff, but you should check here too if the contents are heavy on fresh straw or not. If they are, the same timing applies. There is always the sporting chance that a load of farm manure will bring fresh weed seeds with it, but I am resigned to the risk. On my thin and poor soil, proper manure is the best dressing for most things because it does the most for the texture of the soil. The weed seeds, if they exist, are a minor inconvenience.

The major inconvenience

is one which at this time of year we often forget. Unless we have long cold spells, the garden is still teeming with slugs, especially with slugs' eggs, which are laid in the most promising patches of well-mulched ground. Slugs emerge on warm days and set about anything from the young basal growth of madonna lilies to the elderberries. They love the young shoots on scillas and even tulips which they sometimes attack just below ground level. They are a real menace to the young growth which should develop next year on any of the hardier chrysanthemums to which I recently paid tribute.

Seeing is usually believing, but slugs are hard to pick out in a late November stroll round the flowerbeds. The best way is poison. Put down slug bait and watch it disappear by the handful, leaving the welcome traces of dying slime in the vicinity. Frost, wind and heavy rain are the familiar foes of early winter, but slugs are the enemy which we easily ignore. At least they are the one we can eradicate.

TRAVEL

A Virgin virgin falls in love with the fun business

Michael Thompson-Noel admits it. He was grumpy when he got to Necker Island, but Bransonland won him over

There is no point visiting Necker Island, Richard Branson's idyllic north-eastern Caribbean hideaway, if you lack humour and playfulness, for in Bransonland those are indispensable qualities.

In *Losing My Virginity*, his recent autobiography, Britain's best known entrepreneur states that well-run businesses should treat their customers, staff, suppliers, investors and (not least) competitors with responsibility and integrity. He also insists that doing business should be fun. "All of us spend most of our lives at work," says Branson, "so for goodness sake let us enjoy it."

I wish I had read his book before setting out for Necker Island. As it was, I was a Virgin virgin. I had neither read Branson's book nor sampled a single manifestation of the groomingly extensive Virgin product list. Never tried the airline, trains, cinemas, cola or clothes, let alone the holidays, financial products, megastores or condoms.

If I had not been a Virgin virgin when I stepped into the uncovered powerboat that was to convey me from Beef Island to Necker Island, I suppose I would have felt more ironic when, drenched to the skin, I finally stepped ashore on Branson's private playground.

But I was a Virgin virgin, so for a while I was lacking in humour, having found the 40-minute powerboat ride to Necker one of the worst experiences of a lifetime devoted to (increasingly) pampered travel.

It was dark. It was stormy. The rain beat down. Every few seconds, when the powerboat struck a wave, we were soaked by seawater. I was appalled. Even scandalised. A most unhappy camper. I felt imperilled. No one had been given a life-jacket. Nor were things helped by discovering, subsequently, that the majority

of visitors to Necker do not use one of the Branson powerboats for that last bit of the journey. Instead, they are whisked to and from the island by helicopter.

However, it was not Necker's fault that my Virgin Atlantic flight from London was late arriving in Antigua, so that we had to transfer in a little Aztec aircraft to Beef Island instead of to Virgin Gorda. Though much closer to Necker, its airport was closed. A friend of mine who visited Necker a few years ago says that, in clear weather, the crossing from Virgin Gorda to Necker is pleasant and quick, so there we are.

Anyway, it says a lot for Necker's charms that by 6am next morning, when I awoke to an intermittently squally yet beautiful October day in the outer reaches of the British Virgin Islands (BVI), I had almost forgotten the shock of the previous night's powerboat dash from Beef to Necker, and within another 24

The atmosphere on Necker is that of a private house, with timings to suit guests

hours was able to talk again in actual sentences.

Someone I met at the Necker breakfast table on the morning after my arrival said he was familiar with Bransonland. "Just go with the flow," said this chain-smoking 60-something, a veteran, by the look of it, of many weird nights. "You can't beat or second-guess Branson, or go round him or through him. So fixate on the mood. Match your step to his step. Relax. Chill out."

Twenty years ago, when Bran-

son was visiting the BVIs, he had nowhere to stay and not much money, but was told that people who expressed a serious interest in buying an island were treated by local estate agents to free accommodation in expensive villas and free trips by helicopter.

Branson liked what he saw of Necker Island, which is 74 acres in extent, even though the estate agent who was showing him round said Necker had no fresh water. It was being sold by a British lord who had never visited it.

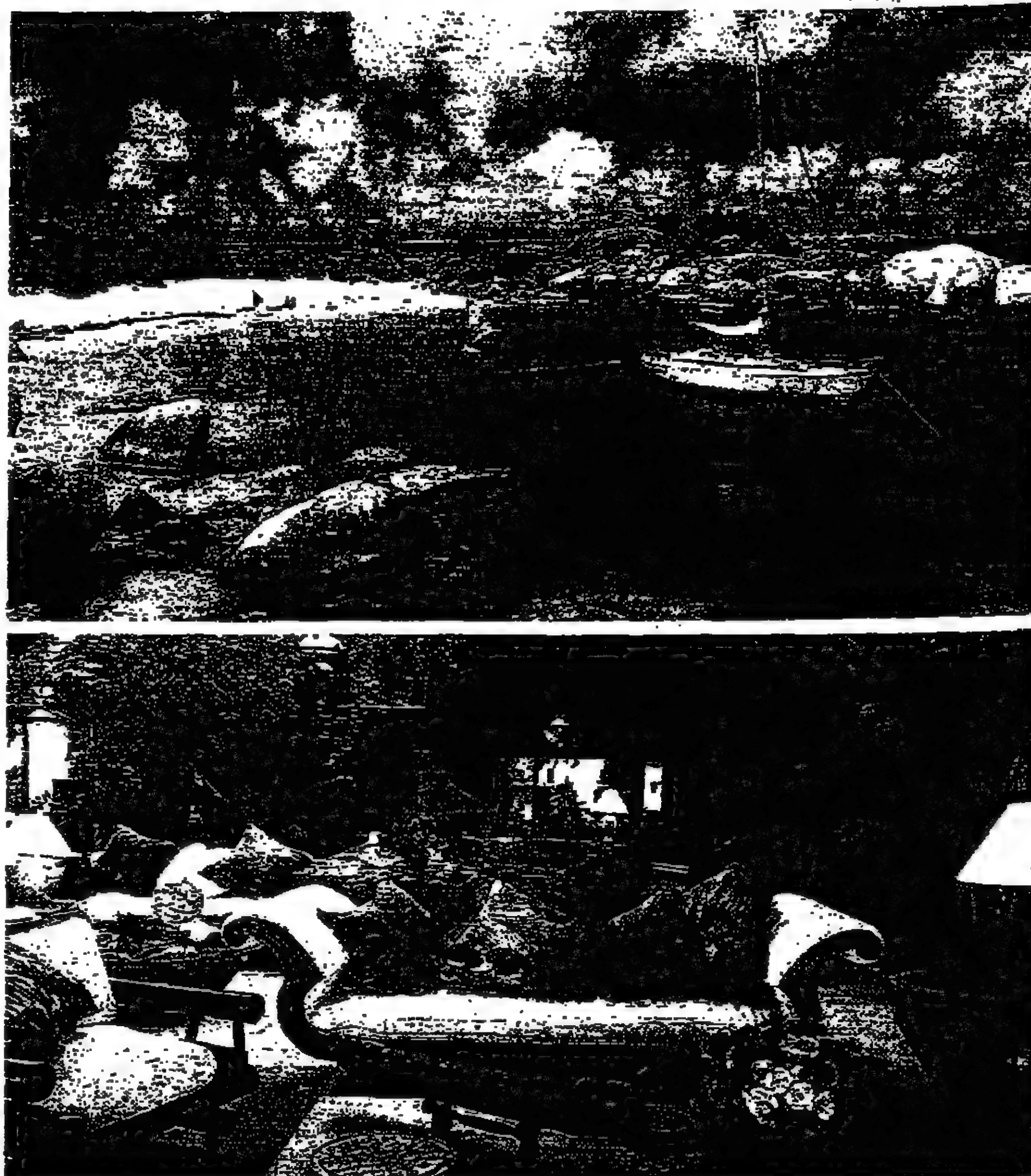
The island was surrounded by a reef, and Branson was told that leather-backed turtles visited Necker to lay their eggs. "There were thousands of nesting gulls and terns," recalls Branson, "and a small flock of pelicans fishing in formation." Inland, he could see two saltwater lakes and a small tropical forest. There were numerous black parrots.

Branson asked how much the owner wanted for Necker. The answer was £3m. "How much were you thinking of spending?" the agent asked. "We could offer £150,000," said Branson. Two years later, back in London, he heard that the owner wanted to sell Necker in a hurry so that he could construct a building somewhere in Scotland which would cost about £200,000.

Branson upped his offer for Necker to £175,000. Finally, he was told he could have Necker for £180,000, so he agreed on the spot and the island became his.

"Necker seems to have been permanently uninhabited," says Branson. "Pre-Columbian artefacts found on neighbouring islands have never been discovered there. Only a few goats were to be seen when I bought it. I wanted to build a home that could be used by my family and friends, while keeping the island as unspoilt as possible.

"However, when the project was finally completed, it seemed such a waste to use the house



The view is from the sea (top) and the furniture and fabrics from Bali

only a few weeks a year, so we decided to rent it out. Now it is used for business meetings, small conferences, top level incentives or as a private holiday island for families and friends."

Construction of the house started in 1982, on Devil's Hill, which has all-round views of Necker and its surroundings. It was designed in what Branson, fond of Bali, calls an airy Bali-nese style, with large parts of it shipped in from all over. The roof, for example, was first shipped to Brazil, taken apart, shipped to Necker and then re-assembled. The stone flooring came from Yorkshire, while most of the furniture and fabrics were made in Bali.

The house is in two sections: 10 bedrooms in one, including the upstairs master bedroom that Branson himself uses, and large, extremely comfortable open-plan

living and dining areas in the other. There is stone terracing outside, with wonderful views, and, at a lower level, a swimming pool and Jacuzzi joined by a small stream and waterfall.

Branson is pleased that each of the bedrooms has balconies which "not only have a sea view but a sky, sun, moon and other-islands view". The master bedroom has its own terrace and Jacuzzi. Apart from the main house there are two Balinese-style guest houses.

Branson loves Necker. This year he has spent three and a half months there, and will be back for Christmas. Ask Branson what there is to do on Necker and you may have trouble shutting him up. "There is no end of things to do," he says. "Two sides of the island are made up of beautiful sandy beaches. You can go swimming, snorkelling, water-

skiing, sailing or windsurfing within yards of the shore. Or you can take a boat out to some of the other islands.

"Try lazing in the sun, marveling at the volcanic scenery or trying some sport fishing. The largest marlin in the world was caught a few hundred yards from Necker. A gentler alternative is to slip on some scuba gear and slide beneath the surface, where you'll find angel, trigger and squirrel fish swimming in rainbow formations and coral reefs.

Branson, whose empire already has substantial hotel interests, is thinking of investing in a number of Necker-style properties - not all islands - around the world, and operating them the way Necker is operated, as private and exclusive playgrounds.

The house on Necker is run by local staff, under Australian man-

agers - Mark Netherwood and wife Joanne - in an efficient yet friendly and relaxed manner. Previously, the Netherwoods were part of the management team on Heron Island, on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Before that they were on North Queensland's Double Island, owned by Australia's richest woman, Janet Holmes a Court.

The atmosphere on Necker is that of a private house, with an open bar and timings to suit guests. Meals are informal, either in the dining room, beside the pool or at the beach, with a style of cuisine that utilises much locally produced fruit, vegetables and fresh fish. Branson is spending a lot of money on his island, making it more lush and Edenic. He would like to grow as much fruit and vegetables as possible. When I was on Necker, they were about to sow 50,000 pineapple

Guests, says Branson, can let Necker's staff make all arrangements for meals, or can stipulate menus they want. I thought the food on Necker was good: not brilliant, but pleasant. And the wines (I don't drink) were said (by people who drink expensive wines every single day) to be first-rate.

Plenty of stars, starlets and other celebs have stayed on Necker. Recently, actress Brooke Shields and her husband, tennis star Andre Agassi, hired Necker for six nights - just the two of them. Basically, you hire the whole island and its 34 staff. What you pay depends on the size of your group. Rates were recently increased.

For a minimum of three nights, groups of 20-26 guests pay an all-inclusive fee (including return powerboat transfers from Virgin Gorda or Beef Island) of \$20,500 per day. Groups of 15-19 guests pay \$17,500 per day, 8-14 pay \$15,500 per day, and one to seven guests pay \$13,000 per day.

Your only difficulty will be deciding whether to take advantage of the free powerboat transfer. If it's a bright day, all well and good. But if it is rainy or stormy, you could get drenched. To be on the safe side, you should probably charter a chopper, the return cost (per helicopter) being approximately \$2,000.

■ **Information and reservations, UK and Europe:** Necker Island (BVI) Ltd, 1 Uxbridge Street, London W8 7TQ. Tel: 0171 313-6109/6110, fax: 0171 727-5343. For the US, Canada and South America, bookings and information are available from Resorts Management in New York, tel: 800 557-4255 or 212 696-4566, fax: 212 698-1592.

HOLIDAYS & TRAVEL

[illegible]

Happy in time's hands

Roger Bray follows the peaceful paths of the Dymock poets

In the restlessly sleeping cornfields of north Gloucestershire, the thunder of wartime guns must have seemed as distant as the pattering of Pacific surf. There can be few places in which the shattering of a rural idyll comes home with such immediate poignancy.

Edward Thomas conveyed how far removed he felt from the carnage in France: "We turned from men or poetry/To rumours of the war remote/Only till both stood disenchanted/For aught but the yellow flavoured coat of an apple wasp had undermined."

It was 1915. Two years later, like so many other young men whose names are listed in ancient village churches in this gentle corner of the English countryside, he was dead.

His companion in the poem was the American, Robert Frost. They are the best known - unless you count Rupert Brooke, who came to visit - of the group which became known as the Dymock Poets. The others were Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson and John Drinkwater.

You could get a snapshot of their brief time here in an hour or so, by car. To get a proper feel

for the landscape which ripened their verse, it is far better to park and walk. Few, it seems, bother. Sections of the eight-mile route which we followed had been obscured by crops. Many waymarks on stile had been ripped off or had cracked and fallen with age.

There was only one short stretch, however, which was so deep in nettles it was impassable, and then only because, in hot sunshine reminiscent of that glorious summer of 1914, we were wearing shorts.

Dymock is a few miles south of Ledbury, in Herefordshire, where we made our base at the Feathers Hotel, a lovely, 18th-century, black-timbered inn, recently extended, which was once a staging post for mail coaches travelling between Cheltenham and Abergystwyth.

Leaflets mapping two "Poets' Paths", which visit places explored and lived in by the Dymock coterie, are available from the town's tourist information centre. One of them passes the lovely little church of St Mary's at Kempey, with its astonishing medieval frescoes, and Abercrombie's cottage at

Ryton, where the literary world went to drink his cider. But it also ducks under the M5, whose insistent roar, we felt, would destroy the illusion of a countryside unchanged.

So we took the other route, starting from Dymock Church, where a small exhibition describes the poets' local lives and works, across cow pastures and along a brook where kingfishers flashed.

It is hard to imagine a distillation of England more intense than this: rolling fields, the drone of farm machinery, neatly ranked apple trees, hazy, distant views of more dramatic hills, hedged lanes whose peace is seldom troubled by traffic.

We called at Preston Church, where another local poet, John Masefield, was christened, climbed a steepish rise and beyond, in a dip, was the house where Thomas lived, unaltered it seemed, save for the addition of modern windows. From there it was a short stretch to Little Dymock, where the poet's black-timbered but not quite as isolated as when Frost lived there, for a

new brick house has been built nearby - but it was reached across a golden cornfield.

In the heat of that summer afternoon we crossed the line of a long disused railway which once ran through these villages, recalling the hissing of steam in that most evocative of Thomas's poems, "Adlestrop", and passed Gibson's former home, the Old Nail Shop.

It was gone 2pm when we reached the Horse Shoe Inn at Broom's Green, as delightful a pub as you could find. The landlady regretted it was too late to make lunch but some of her customers reckoned her pickled eggs were "world class" - and she popped one into an open bag of crisps to prove it. We sat under the shade of a great cherry tree with wind chimes in it, drinking chilled cider made at nearby Much Marcle, and were reluctant to continue the walk.

It would be foolish to imagine that the Dymock poets lived in harmony as unblemished as this. Doubtless, jealousies menaced beneath the surface. Was Gibson such a gamekeeper with a 12-bore, perhaps because Frost's accent was strange.



Dymock: To get a proper feel for this poets' landscape it is better to park and walk

had sense, writing about things instead of creating them?

And just how accommodating were the people who lived there? Some were paranoid at the notion that German spies might be sniffing around, for Thomas and Frost were challenged as such by a gamekeeper with a 12-bore, perhaps because Frost's accent was strange.

But for all that it must have seemed, to borrow from Dylan Thomas, that time held them happy in its hands. Lying on our backs in a field of stubble after lunch and listening to the bees, the thought occurred, as it must have done to them in the shadow of war, how cruel it is that such perfection is so transitory.

■ The Feathers at Ledbury (tel: 01531-635266) offers special breaks from £57.50 per person sharing a double or twin room and staying at least two nights. The price includes an excellent full English breakfast, an allowance of £17.50 towards dinner - the roasted rack of local lamb is delicious - and use of the new spa, which has an indoor pool, Jacuzzi, steam room and small exercise room.

My heart sank. My caddy grimaced as I tallied up the score - 45, 56, 65, 74. Plus 70. 144. My attempt to acquire a golf game was stuck in the same place as my ball - on the rough.

I was on an extended stay in Thailand, surrounded by lush, luscious boom-era golf courses charging recession-era £12 (£20) green fees and I, seemingly, could not take advantage.

After a few frantic phone calls and an e-mail or two, I suddenly found myself speeding out of Bangkok and gazing out at limestone mountains spiralling up from the Thai royal family's beachside holiday destination of Hua Hin. A spot of instruction was the order at this Mecca of south-east Asian golf, where the first course was carved out of the jungle by a Scottish railway engineer in 1904.

As Frank Gilbride, a mem-

ber of the British PGA for more than 30 years, walked up and grabbed my hand heartily. I quickly realised this was going to be no ordinary learning experience. Frank would not even guarantee that he would allow me on the course.

"Let's look at your swing first," he said in a way that was both cheerful and ominous, leading me out to the driving range. "Don't jump the gun. You need someone standing behind you, talking to you, helping you get that feeling."

Yes, that feeling of hitting a golf ball square and following its precise humpback trajectory towards its intended target. I imagined its contagious pleasure. Why else would this quiet resort - lacking the aggressive girth bars that plague Thailand's more famous beaches - be

able to support nearly a dozen championship golf courses and be home to professional players on the Asian PGA tour.

As much as anyone, Frank is responsible for introducing golfing at Hua Hin to the outside world. Sure, Thai property tycoons made the investments and the likes of Jack Nicklaus and Roger Packwood designed the courses, but Frank has pushed it as a destination for golfing holidays. As Thailand steps up its promotion of new niche tourism markets, his five-year-old company, Hua Hin Golf Tours, expects to sell 10,000 green fees.

During the winter, when many European golf courses close and the company is responsible for accommodating and entertaining over 150 golfers per day, there is

Information

■ Hua Hin Golf Tours, +66 32 530 321 or www.frangipani.com, runs golf tours year-round and has optional side trips to courses in the River Kwai area. Prices start at about \$300 for five days including hotel accommodation, airport transfers and green fees.

■ Companies with tours in other parts of Thailand include Golden Eagle Sports (www.goldeneagle.com), which has tours from about \$550 for four days. Ted Bardacke stayed in Hua Hin courtesy of the Imperial Lake View hotel and golf club.

so much demand for instruction to hit one ball. How was I ever going to get on the course? Plus, all this new movement, though not very difficult, was a tad uncomfortable.

"Gooooood," said Frank when I shyly suggested to him that I felt like a poorly-skilled contortionist.

"If it feels wrong, it's probably right," he said, offending my modern do-whatever-feels-right sensibilities. "Now hit the ball."

Until it worked. I do not know what happened but somehow there were the balls hitting the 100-yard marker, jumping off my nine-iron with subtle spin. They say golf is a mental game but I think it is more like dancing. You get into a groove and you simply do not want to stop.

Day two presented a dilemma. I could get in nine holes before Frank arrived for breakfast or I could fol-

low my teacher's "don't push it" suggestion. A bit stiff and a little lazy, I decided not to play. Yet sitting out on the veranda with my coffee and overlooking the immaculate fairway of the Lakeview course, I immediately regretted the decision. It was all so empty and green and, as Frank walked up, I shivered at the thought of being consigned to the practice tee all day.

Every new element in a golf swing provides new challenges. It takes time to work things out but I did not have that time. I was hitting well and begged to be pushed further, only to lose concentration, then lose focus and start doing damage to my swing.

So Frank gave me a challenge. Hit well in the rest of the afternoon and I could shoot a round on Sunday.

But he made it difficult. I practised chip-and-runs from the edge of the green, then bunker shots and short pitches, and finally worked my way through my golf bag: nine-iron, seven-iron, five-iron, five-wood off the tee, five-wood off the tee, three-wood off the tee.

It was going well until I was about to hit the day's last practice ball. Frank stepped in, picked it up and threw it away with a smile.

"See you on the first tee tomorrow." His voice sounded like the popping of a champagne cork. I had made it.

Later, heading back to Bangkok past palm trees in rice fields, with frogs jumping across the road and a cricket clinging to my windshield, I tallied up my Sunday score: 45, 50, 56, 61. Plus 63, including my first bogey - 124. Not great but certainly good enough for me to return.

Ted Bardacke

Teeing off - at last - in Thailand

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TRAVEL



Guadalupe, a name which means wolf river: but the last wolf in the district was killed in 1947

Rural rescue in his backyard

Adam Hopkins explores the plains and mountains between Seville and Salamanca

Pedro Blanco is one of that new generation from Spain's somewhat remote Extremadura region. Born and raised in a village in deepest countryside, he was educated, against the odds, on a scholarship in the new University of Extremadura.

Today he is working - lucky to have a job at all, he says - in his very own Extremaduran backyard, that rough collection of plains and mountains which fills the empty spaces between Seville and Salamanca.

Although not meaning very much statistically, there are quite a few like him from the local university, engaged in the urgent task of rural promotion which is, around here, a synonym for rural rescue. One of the main objects is to offer other young people the chance to stay at home and make a living.

In Pedro's case, on a European-funded project, it involves the boosting of small local businesses, often based on arts and crafts, and local produce such as chestnuts, runner beans, cork, cherries, honey, wine and the gathering of wild mushrooms from the forests. Tourism also features on the list.

Now, Pedro is a geographer by discipline, and, given his origins, his intellectual formation and what you might call his business interests, he has an eye for all things wild and rustic. So when he offered to take me walking in the mountains,

on his free Saturday, what could I say but "yes, yes please" and wait for the event.

His bailiwick is the district of Las Villuercas, where shaggy sierra covered in cistus and giant heather rises around the monastery of Guadalupe, with its famous Arabic-Hispanic style

Cervantes supposedly prayed here before his entry to the monastery

(mudejar) cloisters and the thrilling, swirlywhirly tracery all over the main facade.

Belonging to the Hieronymites, who were especially close to the Castilian royals, Guadalupe was a regular stop-over for a monarchy which ruled, right up until the modern era, by constant itineration. The name, as Pedro pointed out, means Wolf River (Waddi Lupus) in that striking assemblage of Arabic and Latin which forms the background to contemporary Castilian. The last wolf in the district was killed in 1947.

I had already done my monastery visit (quite a few others were doing the same, tourism needing little boosting in Guadalupe itself, nor in the conquistador towns of Cáceres and Trujillo, come to that) with special atten-

tion, as is only proper, to the suite of paintings by the Extremaduran master Zurbarán.

They tell the history of the Hieronymite order and still hang - a colossal rarity - in their original position. I had eaten well and drunk too deeply at the former pilgrims' hospital beside the monastery, today a paradox - that is to say, one of Spain's chain of state hotels, most often sited in historic buildings. Now it seemed time for a little exercise.

A second Pedro, Pedro Diosdado, local gym teacher and part-time guide, turned out in his four-wheel drive to set us on our way. We popped in first to the sinuously decorated shrine or *humilladero*, also *mudejar* in style, on the approach road to Guadalupe.

Cervantes supposedly prayed here before his entry to the monastery (Columbus prayed in Guadalupe too and, for better or worse, the first indigenous Indians he brought to Spain were also baptised here). After that it was straight on up to a man-built snow hole - like a deep, wide well - high on a mountain ridge. Here the monks once kept their perishable viands, in sedulous, lichen-packed ice and snow, right into the hotter weather.

We looked out over mountain ridges running away from us in straight lines, with reptilian, quartzite backbones, heather and cistus on the slopes, and plenty of that lichen-covered, stunted oak familiar in these parts, along with a few olive

trees and extensive chestnut plantings. The villages were few but looked neat against their immense and rugged backdrop.

Donning our boots at last, and with the sun by now staring down alarmingly from straight above, we all set off downhill into the valley of the river Vieja.

Right at the start we encountered another hole, wider than deep this time, dug out for sand for the medieval copper-works in Guadalupe. Then it was along the bridge path - in Spanish, *sendero de herradura* or horseshoe trail - occasionally unearthing horseshoes worn water-thin.

We dawdled down, we talked - perhaps too much to allow us to see the road which lives in the woods. "It is good to go slowly," said Pedro the Schoolteacher, "to see, touch, smell - it's not a sporting event."

Wild boar had been digging at the roots of almost everything; birds of prey had left their pellets of fur and bone; we found fox droppings like nut-brittle composed of cherry stones and the undigested legs of grasshoppers. We swarmed in the sun, rested in the shade and drank with gusto from our water bottles, all the time to the sound of water.

Eventually, we crossed the river and began to climb, talking about the Spanish civil war - extremely well remembered. Supported by the underground communist network, which somehow survived Franco's victory,

the *maquis* guerrillas staged the occasional place of minor sabotage and sometimes popped down to the villages to father a child or two. Though Spaniards in other regions are often reluctant to discuss the war, here the *maquis* loom outside in local mythology.

We talked too of Alfonso XI of Castile, who wrote in his *Book of Hunting* in the first half of the 14th century, of an encounter with 10 bears in the Vieja valley, in just the part we were traversing. His party killed four of them and six escaped; and now, when the path is opened up again and signposted - later this year, per-

By chance, we met an old lady crocheting in the shade of a rubbly wall

haps, in the service of country hikers - it will be known as the Ruta de Alfonso XI.

Eventually, we climbed out of the valley, breasting the high ridge again, coming down at walk's end to the village of Navacerrada, red in the face and wet with sweat (I'm speaking personally here) to drink beer with the village mayor in the bar of J&B Disco.

In the event we went on a little further, in Pedro the Schoolmaster's vehicle - hoping to see griffon vul-

tures and maybe Egyptian vultures, too, much honoured among birdwatchers - to a tiny, half-empty village called Cabanas del Castillo.

The civil war went with us. For here, by chance, we met an old lady crocheting in the shade of a rubbly wall. There had been a visitor to the village recently, who claimed a personal connection with the place.

"Yes," the old lady said, "I told her her grandmother was the one who went with the priest. He tried to escape in a straw hat when the war came but someone from Cabanero recognised him and killed him in the mountains."

It was a scramble up to the castle, on a crag almost directly above the houses, but we were gratified to see a sign which read, "Por favor, no tiren piedras al pueblo." Please don't throw stones at the village.

High overhead, vast birds were rising on the thermals; and as we rested, in agreeable exhaustion, at the foot of a medieval tower, most probably Moorish, we hardly bothered to raise our binoculars.

Adam Hopkins took his car to Bilbao on the P&O ferry from Portsmouth and then drove to Extremadura. Tel: 0950-980555 for details of fares and sailings.

For further information: Spanish National Tourist Board, 22-23 Manchester Square, London W1 M 5AP. Tel: 0171-486 8077. In the US tel: +1 212 265 8222 (New York).

...update...update...

□ EARLY DAYS: Get to know Australia's aboriginal culture on a two-week visit with Prospect, in conjunction with the University of Queensland, next April or October. As well as visits to rock art and ancient tribal lands, see art collections in Sydney and Brisbane, hear talks and poetry readings, visit rainforest, watch opera in Sydney. Cost from £2,995; details from +44 0181-995 2151.

□ BLUE SUEDE CRUISE: Norwegian Cruise Line mounts what it reckons is the first cruise to commemorate Elvis Presley's birthday (January 8) next year. Tribute singers, trivia quizzes, replica Graceland cake, and the 10 Flying Elvis will skydive on to a Bahamas beach. Details: +44 0800-181560.

□ CABBALLISTIC: Take a personalised tour of London in a traditional black cab with Black Taxi Tours of London (+44 0171-289 4371). You can modify the basic route, stop for photos, and get a full commentary from the driver. Two-hour tours cost £85 (a bit more on December 25 and 26) but you can split it among five passengers.

□ FAST TRACK: Eurostar now carries 90 per cent of clients who take short breaks in Paris, and 65 per cent of those visiting Brussels, and has boosted Lille into the top 20 destinations, reports Creta Holidays (0161-929 0000).

□ BORDERS BOOKING: Take a luxury two-night break at Sandawa House Hotel on the Scottish Borders for £160: half-board plus a round of golf or clay-pigeon shooting lesson, and golfing, fishing, visiting whisky distilleries or shopping for cashmere in your spare time. Tel: +44 01573-450331.

□ JUST THE FAX: At your aircraft seat soon, a BT airborne fax service. You'll be able to send up to five 40-character lines for about \$4.95, without getting up.

□ COOK BOOK: Want a map of Alpine ski resorts, UNESCO world heritage sites, Germany's Romantic Road, US climate, the Trans-Siberian railway, European blue flag beaches? All these and more are in the *World Atlas of Travel* (Thomas Cook, £24.99), a travellers' delight, with 200 pages of specialist charts, travel statistics and public transport routes.

□ FIRST CENTURY: Cape Town's luxury Mount Nelson Hotel turns 100 in March, and is celebrating with a special three-night package from April 1 to October 1: B&B plus a dinner, transfers, massage or manicure, from R950 (£105) a night for a double room. Call Orient-Express, +44 0171-805 5080.

□ LONGSHIP: Royal Caribbean International's *Voyager of the Seas* will have an atrium, the length of two football pitches and modelled on Burlington Arcade in London. Result: indoor ice rink, too. It will be launched next October.

□ BEAR ESSENTIALS: View European brown bears from hides on the Russian-Finnish border (you stay in a former frontier guard station) as they feed their new cubs under the midnight sun, on trips with Wildlife Worldwide (+44 0181-867 9159): £1,095 including other wildlife viewing, too.

□ GROWTH INDUSTRY: The Tech Museum of Innovation, at San Jose in California, reopens this month six times as big as before, with areas dealing with exploration, communication, biotechnology and innovation - as befits the top museum in Silicon Valley.

□ IN THE SWING: Carden Park, near Chester, has become so popular in 15 months that it has increased its bedrooms from 125 to 192, and added a Jack Nicklaus residential golf school and new course, bringing the total number of holes to 45. Tel: 01829-731000.

□ MEGABITE: If you see a piranha in the Amazon on a Wildlife Discovery luxury riverboat cruise, catch it and the chef will cook it. Look for giant otter, dolphins, even jaguar (don't eat them). Details from +44 01737-223903.

□ FREE UPGRADE to "best car on the site" to the first 25 customers to book weekend rentals at Hertz in Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Leeds and Aberdeen; tel: 0950 905090.

□ 28 NIGHTS at the Casuarina Beach Resort, Penang, in January/February from £995, with Malaysia Experience (0181-424 9548).

□ SPOUSE GOES FREE when you fly to Beirut with MEA airline (0171-493 5681) before December 13. John Westbrooke



The mountain gods of the Chugach

You really do have to be an optimist for this sport, says François von Hurter

We were on a tiny snow platform, barely large enough to put down our equipment, with a vertical rock face dropping 2,000ft on one side and what appeared to be an impossibly steep powder gully on the other.

The landing had been delicate. The pilot had nudged about a third of the helicopter skids on to the snow platform, keeping the engine at full power to keep the tail horizontal as we unloaded skis, poles and rucksacks. It was eight in the evening. We had two hours of daylight left.

The helicopter lifted off, its nose rising briefly before it dived down the mountain face. The sound of the rotors shuddering lasted a few seconds. The helicopter dropped behind a ridge. Then there was absolute silence.

Four of us were standing on the summit of an unnamed and never-skiied mountain in this sport. The expectation of first tracks - truly first, not just early bird tracks in one's favourite couloir in the Alps - was a powder skier's dream.

Not a breath of wind, an indigo cloudless sky and glaciers walled in by sharply serrated crags. The sun was low; we had already been skiing for nearly 12 hours that day. At this stage we were running on adrenalin and little else.

Our guide, an optimistic young American called Rick, dug a snow hole to check for

avalanche risk. "You're gonna like this one," he said laughing. Three short graceful turns and he vanished down a snow bulge; down a slope that we assumed would be giddily steep.

Only six days before we had been sitting at our desks in the City. Now we were trying to imagine what to expect beyond the ridge.

Our guide was invisible, hidden by the sheer steepness of the mountain as he floated down through the powder. After about 10 minutes we heard Rick's laconic command on the two-way radio: "Next."

We knew the drill. In the Chugach you ski one at a time, down the fall line in turns sufficiently tight to control your speed. Avoiding a fall is high on your priority list; perfect style is not. I set off skiing close to the guide's tracks, involuntarily holding my breath as I went over the bulge into a wall of near vertical powder.

You have to be an optimist to engage in this sport. In my case fear often creeps in to steal the scene. I looked into a ragged rhythm, concentrating on my turns and beginning to enjoy things as the slope eased a bit.

There were rock buttresses on either side, funneling the snow into a narrow slot. Safely tucked away below the slot was Rick. I made my way down to him, stopped just below, also in the lee of the buttress, and we exchanged slightly crazed grins. "Epic line," he said, watching the others ski the slope, one at a time.



Passionate about powder in Alaska's Chugach mountains

For three years I had dreamt of coming to Alaska. I had seen pictures of pyramid-shaped mountains with perfect snow fluting, powder tracks coming down in long sensual curves. I had heard stories about Chet Simmons, the legendary Chugach pilot who pioneered heli-skiing in the area.

We had arrived a week earlier in Anchorage and driven six hours to the Tsatina Lodge. This was to be our base, a wooden structure near Thompson Pass on the highway linking Fairbanks to Valdez.

Valdez is a small port that houses the southern terminal of the Trans-Alaska pipeline; it made unfortunate headlines when the eponymous tanker spilled its contents a few years back.

There we met Doug and Emily Coombs, owners of Valdez Heli Ski Guides, which organised our stay in Alaska. Emily took one look at our ski mountaineering

gear. "You guys must shop together," she said, a smile only partly suppressed. She was an attractive woman and one of the best free skiers and guides in America. So much for our macho attitude.

Armed with identical skis and touring bindings, we walked over to the helicopter for our safety briefing. We were then instructed on basic helicopter, avalanche and skiing procedures. It became apparent that Coombs were passionate about mountains, highly respectful of the potential danger and keen to share their passion with us.

The World Extreme Skiing Championships had brought them to Alaska nearly a decade ago. They had fallen under the spell of this gigantic state and its virgin mountains.

Chugach mountain range is 250 miles long and, in parts, 62 wide - the size of the Austrian and Swiss Alps

combined but without human settlement. They will be making first descents here for many years to come.

The briefing continued: "If the aircraft is grounded and catches fire just get as far away as possible. The extinguisher is useless if the fuel ignites."

As we flew off I thought of the guide's calm explanation: "Before starting down any slope look for islands of safety, areas protected by cliffs or rock ridges, that you will hopefully ski to if a slide is set off. If you are caught in a slide fight your way to safety. Fight like a mad dog. What you do in the first seconds will determine whether you live or die."

Our week did not require the intervention of canine reflexes. The mountain gods were with us.

We skied in total bliss for a week. Descents started in knee-deep powder and then, with a slight change of exposure, were transformed into silky corn snow in the space of two turns. We saw white mountain goats, eagles and ptarmigan.

Of wolf and bear we saw only tracks. We did not linger in areas tracked by bear: this was May and slightly bewildered, hungry mother bears were emerging with their cubs. Not a good time to be about, we were told.

Each descent was an adventure, carefully prepared, entered into gingerly and skied with respect. A mad form of meditation.

Evenings were spent at Tsatina, drinking at a well-worn bar before enjoying an

invariably late dinner. Guides, clients and other adrenalin junkies returned from the mountain at 8.30pm or 9pm clanking into the lodge with ice screws, carabiners and other gear still attached to their safety harnesses. Conversation was strictly about couloirs, peaks and the day's skiing.

Lisa, the lodge owner, believed in keeping things simple. The food was delicious, the cabins free of phones or faxes.

Doug and Emily saved the best for last. On our ultimate day we were to ski from our base in the Chugach to the Pacific Ocean and back. We started early and skied one intoxicating descent after the other, leap-frogging our way south from Thompson Pass to Cordova, a fishing village accessible only by boat.

The Gulf of Alaska became visible on the penultimate mountain ridge before Cordova. A dark blue strip on the horizon where the glacier plunged into the ocean. The last run took us almost to the water's edge.

We spent the late afternoon and evening exploring our way back, trying to ski new peaks and glaciers all the way to the lodge. We eventually clattered in, the night falling as rapidly as the temperature, exhausted, happy and ready to plan our next visit to the wilderness.

François von Hurter skied with Valdez Heli Ski Guides, PO Box 25028 Jackson, Wyoming 83001. Email: doug@coombsbssnet.com. Tel: +1 907 385 4228.

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INTERNATIONAL ARTS GUIDE

What's on around the world

ADELAIDE

OPERA
State Opera of South Australia
The Ring: first cycle of Wagner's opera. Staged by Pierre Strosser and conducted by Jeffrey Tate, this performance of The Ring is the first in Australia since 1913; to Nov 24. The second cycle follows from Nov 27 to Dec 4.

AMSTERDAM

EXHIBITIONS
Rijksmuseum
Tel: 31-20-673 2121
● The Festival of Lithography: celebration of the 200th anniversary of the discovery of lithography. Based on the mutual repulsion of water and fat, it's new printing technique represented a major advance for the first time it was unnecessary to scratch and cut into a plate. The exhibition consists of works from the collection, including lithographs by Toulouse-Lautrec, works by Cézanne, Manet, and Dutch artists including Van Gogh; to Jan 10.
● Van Gogh in the Rijksmuseum: during the period of the Van Gogh Museum's closure for renovation and building work, a selection of its finest holdings will be exhibited in the Rijksmuseum's South Wing; to Mar 7.

Stedelijk Museum
Tel: 31-20-5732911
www.stedelijk.nl
Bill Viola, 25 Year Survey - A Video Journey: major survey of work by the American video artist. Includes more than 15 installations and 20 video tapes, as well as sketches and notes; to Nov 29.

OPERA
Netherlands Opera, Het Muziektheater
Tel: 31-20-551 8911
The Rake's Progress: by Stravinsky. Conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw in a staging by Peter Sellars. Cast includes Donald McIntyre, Thomas Randle and Willard White; Nov 23, 26.

BOSTON

EXHIBITION
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Tel: 1-617-267 5900
Monet in the 20th Century: more than 80 works painted by the artist in the last decades of his life. Beginning with paintings of the garden at Giverny, the show concludes with five of the monumental water lily paintings that Monet called Grandes Décorations; to Dec 27.

CHICAGO

CONCERTS
Orchestra Hall
Tel: 1-312-294-3000
www.chicagosymphony.org
● Chicago Symphony Orchestra: conducted by Pierre Boulez in the world premiere of Thomas's Orbital Beacoms, and in works by Debussy. With the women of the Chicago Symphony Chorus conducted by Dusan Wolfe; Nov 27, 28.

EXHIBITIONS
Art Institute Of Chicago
Tel: 1-312-443 3800
www.artic.edu
● Art and Archaeology of Ancient West Mexico: more than 200 works, including terracotta figures found in tombs, and findings of recent excavations. Many of these objects have never before been publicly exhibited; to Dec 6.
● Julia Margaret Cameron's Women: 60 vintage prints of Victorian subjects such as Julia Jackson, mother of Virginia Woolf, and Alice Liddell. Cameron's portraits of Browning, Darwin and Tennyson are well known. Her dramatic, psychological pictures of women are less familiar. The exhibition will travel to San Francisco; to Jan 3.

OPERA
Lyric Opera of Chicago
Tel: 1-312-332 2244
www.lyricopera.org
Ariadne auf Naxos: by R. Strauss. New production by John Cox, conducted by Robert Spano. Cast includes Deborah Voigt and Susan Graham; Nov 21, 24.

COPENHAGEN

EXHIBITION
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk
Tel: 45-4919 0719
www.louisiana.dk
Joan Miró: major retrospective comprising 140 paintings, drawings and sculptures, including works borrowed from the artist's family since the exhibition was shown in Stockholm over the summer; to Jan 10.

EDINBURGH

EXHIBITIONS
Royal Museum
Tel: 44-131-225 7534
www.rms.ac.uk
Chinese Lacquer: 48 objects selected from the museum's lacquerware collection, the oldest of which is more than 2,000 years old. Highlights include an eared cup from the Han dynasty and two 18th century Qing thrones; to Mar 28.

Scottish National Portrait Gallery
Tel: 44-131-624 6200
Robin Gillanders: Little Sparta. Photographs of the painter Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden at Dunsyre in the Pentlands Hills. Gillanders has been working there since 1963, and the display includes a range of collaborative works - posters, prints and postcards; to Nov 29.

OPERA
Edinburgh Festival Theatre



'Last Judgment' by Jan van Cleve (c.1485-1540/1) is one of the works displayed in 'From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting', an exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Tel: 44-131-529 6000
Scottish Opera: Tristan und Isolde, by Wagner, in a production by Yannis Korkos, directed here by Peter Watson and conducted by Richard Armstrong. Cast includes Jeffrey Lawton and Eva-Maria Bundschuh; Nov 21.

FRANKFURT

EXHIBITION
Schirn Kunsthalle
Tel: 49-69-259 8820
Alberto Giacometti retrospective of work by the Swiss sculptor and painter. Also featuring prints and drawings, the exhibition charts Giacometti's artistic output from his early years in 1920s Paris to his death in 1966; to Jan 3.

HELSINKI

DANCE
Finnish National Ballet
Tel: 358-9-403 021
Giselle: staging by Sylvie Guillem. With sets and costumes by Ramón B. Ivars. Conducted by David Garforth; Nov 24, Nov 26, 28.

EXHIBITION
Museum of Contemporary Art
Tel: 358-0-173 361
Bruce Nauman: spanning the career of the American artist, b.1941, this exhibition focuses on his relationship with language, and includes sound and video installations as well as neon pieces like One Hundred Live and die (1984); to Jan 24.

HUDDERSFIELD

CONCERTS
Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival
Tel: 44-1484-430 528
● BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra: conducted by Tan Dun in the UK premiere of his opera Marco Polo. Concert performance, with the Chorus of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama; Town Hall; Nov 22.
● Elliott Carter 90th Birthday Tribute: works by Carter, including the European premiere of his Piano Quintet, performed by the Arditi String Quartet and pianist Ursula Oppens; St. Paul's Hall; Nov 27.
● Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir: conducted by Tonu Kaljuste in the UK premiere of Arvo Pärt's Canon of Repentance; St. Paul's Hall; Nov 23.
● Nash Ensemble: conducted by Martyn Brabbins in works by Turnage, Simon Holt and John Casken. With mezzo soprano Jean Rigby and oboe soloist Gareth Hulce; St. Paul's Hall; Nov 21.

DANCE
Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival
Tel: 44-1484-430 528
Jonathan Burrows Group: three dancers perform new work drawing on music and ideas by Matteo Fargion, Tom Johnson and Kevin Volans. Lighting by Michael Hulls; Lawrence Batley Theatre; Nov 24.

OPERA
Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival

Tel: 44-1484-430 528
Opera North: The Nightingale's to Blame. World premiere of a new opera by Simon Holt, based on a play by Lorca, translated by David Johnston. The conductor is Nicholas Kok and the staging is by Martin Duncan; Lawrence Batley Theatre; Nov 21, 22.

LISBON

EXHIBITION
Fundação Arpad Szenes - Vieira da Silva
Tel: 351-1-388 0044
Alberto Giacometti: Arpad Szenes and Vieira da Silva met Giacometti in the 1930s, through gallery owner Jeanne Bucher. The 19 sculptures and 20 drawings on display here are loaned by the Maeght Foundation, Saint-Paul, and include such famous pieces as Femme de Venise and Homme qui marche; to Jan 31.

LONDON

CONCERT
Barbican Hall
Tel: 44-171-638 8891
● London Symphony Orchestra: Sir Colin Davis conducts a series of works by Elgar; Nov 25.

EXHIBITIONS
National Gallery
Tel: 44-171-639 3321
Mirror Image: Jonathan Miller on Reflection. Show exploring the representation of mirrors in art, curated by Miller and featuring loans from public and private collections. Includes Van Eyck's famous Arnolfini Portrait, and works by Freud, Callot and George Romney; to Dec 13.

Royal Academy of Arts
Tel: 44-171-300 8000
● Charlotte Salomon: born in Berlin in 1917, Charlotte Salomon died in Auschwitz in 1943, after living in hiding in the south of France for three years, during which time she produced a series of 789 gouaches called Life? Or Theatre?, exhibited here, which has been interpreted as a form of self-protection against the violence of the Nazi era; to Jan 17.
● Picasso: Sculptor and Painter in Clay. This first major exhibition of Picasso's ceramics will include around 100 pieces, many of which have never before been exhibited. They will be shown with some paintings and sculptures, demonstrating how Picasso developed his ideas across different media; to Jan 1.

Tate Gallery
Tel: 44-171-887 8000
John Singer Sargent: large-scale retrospective containing 150 paintings, including major public and private loans, includes late landscapes and American and British society portraits from the 1880s to the early 1900s; to Jan 17.

Victoria and Albert Museum
Tel: 44-171-838 6500
● Aubrey Beardsley: more than 200 drawings, prints, posters and books created during the brief period of the artist's fame. The exhibition, which arrives in London after touring in

Japan, marks the centenary of Beardsley's tragically early death, aged 25; to Jan 10.
● Grinling Gibbons and the Art of Carving: drawings, carvings and religious reliefs are displayed alongside the Cosimo panel, commissioned by Charles II and the woodcarver's masterpiece. The exhibition also aims to present some historical context; to Jan 31.

OPERA
English National Opera, London Coliseum
Tel: 44-171-632 8300
Boris Godunov: by Mussorgsky. Conducted by Paul Daniel in a new staging by Francesca Zambello. John Tomlinson sings the title role; Nov 24, 27.

MARTIGNY

EXHIBITION
Fondation Pierre Gianadda
www.gianadda.ch/index.html
Paul Gauguin retrospective: organised to mark the gallery's 20th anniversary. More than 100 works have been borrowed from public and private collections from around the world; to Nov 22.

MILAN

EXHIBITION
Pinacoteca di Brera
La Dama con l'ermellino: Leonardo da Vinci's 1489 portrait of the young mistress of Ludovico il Moro travels to Italy for the first time since 1800, when it was purchased by the Polish Prince Czartoryski; to Dec 13.

MUNICH

CONCERTS
Philharmonie Gasteig
Tel: 49-89-5481 8181
Munich Philharmonic Orchestra: conducted by Zubin Mehta in works by Liszt, Beethoven and Berlioz. With piano soloist Radu Lupu; Nov 21, 23, Nov 24.

EXHIBITION
Haus der Kunst
Tel: 49-89-211270
The Night: exploring the development of the nocturne, or night time scene, in western art from the 15th to the 20th century. Includes early examples by artists including Cranach, Baroque works by Caravaggio and his followers, and works by the German Romantics. Other artists represented include Goya, Munch, Max Ernst and Magritte; to Feb 7.

NAGOYA

EXHIBITION
Matsuzakaya Art Museum
The Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: touring show of 84 paintings, ranging from the 18th century to the early 20th. Highlights include 19th century Spanish works and works by American painters; from Nov 21 to Dec 8.

NEW YORK

CONCERT

Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center
Tel: 1-212-675 5030
www.lincolncenter.org
New York Philharmonic: conducted by Christian Thielemann in works by W. Schuman and R. Strauss. With cello soloist Carter Brey; Nov 21.

EXHIBITIONS
Guggenheim Museum
Tel: 1-212-423 3500
www.guggenheim.org
1989, Rendezvous: in their holdings of artworks from 1900 to 1945, the Guggenheim and the Centre Georges Pompidou are remarkably similar, with one often owning a preliminary study for a painting in the collection of the other. The closure of the Musée national d'art moderne for renovation has created the unique opportunity for this exhibition, which brings together related works by the same artist, or works by different artists on the same theme. The display, which seeks to highlight differences as well as similarities between the collections, includes works by Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky and Chagall; to Jan 24.

Guggenheim Museum SoHo
Tel: 1-212-423 3500
www.guggenheim.org
Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture & Design from France, 1958-1989. Exploration of the different ways in which artists have engaged with space. Display ranges across installation, film, video, photography and architecture. Includes works by Yves Klein, Le Corbusier, Louise Bourgeois and Sophie Calle; to Jan 10.

Metropolitan Museum of Art
Tel: 1-212-879 5500
www.metmuseum.org
● From Van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting. Almost 100 paintings from the collection, exhibited together for the first time; to Jan 3.
● Heroic Armour of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and His Contemporaries. Comprehensive survey of the classically inspired armour made by the most celebrated Italian armourer of the 16th century. Includes more than 60 richly decorated suits of armour, worn by Renaissance kings and captains. Includes public and private loans from Europe and North America; to Jan 17.
● Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sakıp Sabancı Collection, Istanbul. 70 objects ranging from the 15th to the 20th century. Includes manuscripts, panels and scrolls; to Dec 13.

Museum of Modern Art
Tel: 1-212-708 9480
www.moma.org
Jackson Pollock: first US retrospective of the Abstract Expressionist since that held at MOMA in 1967. Including more than 100 paintings and 50 works on paper, the show promises to be a highlight of the New York art calendar - then transferring to London; to Feb 2.

Whitney Museum of American Art
Tel: 1-212-3272801
Mark Rothko: major retrospective of the American abstract artist, including loans from Europe and Japan. The 100 works on display encompass all phases of Rothko's career, from the late 1920s to 1970, with an emphasis placed on the so-called surrealist and classic periods. The show arrives from Washington and will be in Paris, at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville, through the winter (dates to be announced); to Nov 29.

OPERA
Metropolitan Opera, Lincoln Center
Tel: 1-212-362 6000
www.metopera.org
● La Bohème: by Puccini. With Julius Rudel conducting and a cast which includes Francesca Pedaci, Gwynne Geyer and Vladimir Grishko; Nov 25.
● Le Nozze di Figaro: by Mozart. New staging by Jonathan Miller, with designs by Peter Davison. The cast is headed by Felicity Lott, Cecilia Bartoli and Bryn Terfel, and the conductor is James Levine; Nov 21.

OTTAWA

EXHIBITIONS
National Gallery of Canada
Tel: 1-613-990 1985
Songs on Stone: James McNeill Whistler and the Art of Lithography. Previously seen in Chicago, around 200 works by the American expatriate, including drawings, etchings and paintings; to Jan 3.

PARIS

CONCERTS
Salle Pleyel
Tel: 33-1-4561 6583
Orchestre de Paris: conducted by Frans Brüggen in works by Schumann and Mendelssohn. With violin soloist Thomas Zehetmair; Nov 25, 26.

EXHIBITIONS
Couvent des Cordeliers
Tel: 33-1-4046 0547
S'asseoir au XIXe siècle: display devoted to the evolution of the chair, including major examples of 20th century design; to Dec 17.

Espace Electra
Tel: 33-1-4284 2360
Photographic Fictions: from Nov 24 to Jan 1.

Grand Palais
Tel: 33-1-4413 1730
Lorenzo Lotto: Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance. 50 paintings, many of them on loan from churches and museums in Italy. The exhibition will have been seen in Washington and Bergamo; to Jan 11.

Musée d'Orsay
Tel: 33-1-4049 4814
www.Musee-Orsay.fr
● Millet/Van Gogh: display of 85 works brought together to demonstrate the influence of Millet on the work of Van Gogh. These include paintings, drawings and pastels by both artists, many of them on loan from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam; to Jan 3.

● Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898): retrospective exploring the work of the French Symbolist poet, and his influential relationships with his literary and artistic contemporaries; to Jan 3.

OPERA
Opéra National de Paris, Opéra Bastille
Tel: 33-1-4473 1300
www.opera-de-paris.fr
The Merry Widow: by Franz Lehár. Conducted by Armin Jordan and with a cast including Frederica von Stade and Hakan Hagegard; Nov 21, 23, 25, 27.

PHILADELPHIA

EXHIBITION
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Tel: 1-215-763 8100
www.philamuseum.org
Delacroix: The Late Work. Organised to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the artist's birth, this exhibition, first seen in Paris, includes 70 paintings and 40 works on paper from private and public collections around the world; to Jan 3.

PORTO ALEGRE

EXHIBITIONS
Various venues
Mercosur Biennial of Visual Arts: retrospective of Latin American art comprising works by 200 artists from seven countries: Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile and Venezuela. Held in 11 locations around the city, the works are grouped under three headings: Constructive, Political and Cartographic; to Nov 30.

ROME

EXHIBITIONS
Palazzo delle Esposizioni
Tel: 39-06-474 5903
Valori Plastici: taking its title from that of a short-lived magazine published by Roman art dealer Mario Broglio, who managed such names as De Chirico, this show includes sculpture and paintings, mainly by Italian artists, but also little-known works by Picasso, Klee and Grosz; to Jan 18.

Palazzo Ruspoli
Tel: 39-6-6830 7344
www.palazzoruspoli.it
The Denis Mahon Collection: last stop for the touring exhibition of more than 80 Italian Baroque paintings collected by Denis Mahon. Includes works by Guercino; to Jan 15.

SAN FRANCISCO

CONCERTS
Davies Symphony Hall
Tel: 1-415-864 6000
www.sfsymphony.org
San Francisco Symphony Orchestra: conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas in works by Haydn, Shostakovich and Brahms. With piano soloist Vladimir Feltsman; Nov 25, 27, 28.

EXHIBITION
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
www.sfmoma.org
Alexander Calder (1898-1976): around 250 works, among them some of the best examples of Calder's formally innovative sculpture. Alongside the mobiles and stables are selected paintings, drawings and jewellery, the intention being to present the breadth of the artist's career on the occasion of the centenary of his birth; to Dec 1.

OPERA
San Francisco Opera, War Memorial Opera House
Tel: 1-415-864 3330
www.sfoopera.com
Norma: by Bellini. Conducted by Patrick Summers in a staging by Andrew Sinclair. The title role is sung by Carol Vanasse; Nov 21, 24, 28.

TOKYO

EXHIBITION
Metropolitan Museum of Photography
Tel: 81-3-3280 0031
Love's Body: Rethinking Naked and Nude in Photography. Includes works by Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Mapplethorpe and Catherine Opie; to Jan 17.

WASHINGTON

EXHIBITIONS
National Gallery of Art
Tel: 1-202-737 4215
www.nga.gov
● Bernini's Rome: Italian Baroque Terracottas from the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. 35 rarely exhibited sculptures, bought by Tsar Paul I from Filippo Farsetti. Among the 14 artists represented are Bernini and Algardi; to Jan 18.
● Van Gogh's Van Goghs: 70 paintings loaned by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Includes such icons as The Potato Eaters (1885), Self-Portrait as an Artist (1889), The Harvest (1888) and Wheatfield with Crows (1890); to Jan 3.

Phillips Collection
Tel: 1-202-387 2151
Impressionists in Winter: Effets de Neige. Inspired by Sisley's Snow at Louveciennes, this display includes 62 works from 44 collections. Artists represented include Monet, Pissarro, Callot, Gauguin and Renoir; to Jan 3.

ZURICH

EXHIBITION
Kunsthaus Zurich
Tel: 41-1-251 6765
Max Beckmann and Paris: more than 100 masterpieces of modern art from public and private collections around the world. Works by Beckmann are shown alongside paintings by Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Léger and Rouault; to Jan 3.

Arts Guide by Susanna Rustin
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FT WEEKEND

Metropolis

Memorial with no redeeming features

It's vast, hideous, embarrassing and, even worse, Leipzig's monument to German militarism is coming apart at the scenes, says Anthony Barber

Creeching inside clammy walls to the top of Europe's largest and ugliest war memorial, giddy from climbing endless, twisting stony steps, wet, cold, short of breath and nauseated by the rank smells of decades of public neglect, the visitor is struck by two thoughts.

Why am I inflicting this experience on myself? And why did the Germans ever inflict this monument on themselves?

It is an object of rare hideousness, Leipzig's 300,000-tonne, 91-metre high Memorial to the Battle of the Nations. Like a slimy colossus, blackened by pollution and coated with a slick moss that is mamba-emerald in colour, it towers above the city's south-eastern suburbs, defiantly stumpy and graceless.

Yet some connoisseurs of tasteless architecture actually prefer its dark, dismal interior to the wretched outside. How could it be otherwise when each of the four muscle-bound giants brooding in the memorial's so-called Hall of Fame weighs 400 tonnes and is 9.5 metres high? Their granite noses alone could flatten a man.

The unsmiling Teutonic quartet are called - in order of translatability into English - Courage, Strength of Faith, National Power, and Willingness to Sacrifice. Such were the qualities deemed, at the time of the monument's construction, to typify the German people. It took 26,500 individual blocks of stone to prove it.

The plain fact is that, unless one is a granite fetishist or a gigantomaniac, the memorial has almost no redeeming features. Even by German standards, its 21-letter name is an unpleasant mouthful: *Das Völkerschlachdenkmal*.

Erected before the first world war, at a time when puffed-up imperial German militarism was at its height, the memorial commemorates the victory of the Prussians, Austrians and Russians over Napoleon's French-led forces outside Leipzig a century earlier in October 1813.

Today, Leipzig's city fathers cannot think what to do with such an embarrassing memorial. It is not just that the monument is in essence a celebration of German military achievement, and such celebrations are not the Done Thing in today's Germany; more prosaically, the problem is that the memorial is rotten and will cost a good DM30m (£10.7m) to restore.

There is no question about the need for repairs. The stony exterior is cracked,

mouldy, gnawed by pollution, crumbling away. Inside, dampness pervades. Puddles of water have settled on many of the 364 steps that spiral up claustrophobically from the crypt, home to 16 massive granite warriors arranged in a circle, to the external observation tower.

From there, one can observe the heavy industrial machinery still busy eliminating Leipzig's Stalinist heritage more than nine years after East Germany's anti-communist revolution.

Just as the memorial was originally funded partly out of public subscriptions, lotteries, and contributions from German nationalist leagues, so Leipzig's city museum has come up with an idea for saving the monument. It is an idea that speaks volumes about the identity and self-perception of today's Germans.

When the memorial was built between 1900 and 1913, the purpose was to give homage to the martial Ger-

man spirit that had secured Napoleon's downfall and would doubtless be needed in the future to keep the French and other enemies at bay.

Those present at the official opening, on October 18, 1913, included Kaiser Wilhelm II and Austria-Hungary's Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whose assassination in Sarajevo eight months later started the war in which this German spirit was once more prominently on display.

United Germany's first democratic experiment, the weak and demilitarised Weimar Republic, did not worry much about the monument. But between 1919 and 1933 soldiers still laid flowers at the crypt's eternal flame in honour of those who had died in 1813.

Under Adolf Hitler's dictatorship, it was a different matter. As in Berlin or Nuremberg, the Nazis and their

paramilitary gangster units liked to use historic public places as a backdrop for their pompous choreographed processions. Outside the Leipzig memorial, a large reflecting pool and open green expanses furnished a suitable setting.

When communism came to this part of Germany, so did a new interpretation of the monument's significance for Germans. East Germany's rigidly pro-Soviet and humourses first leader, Walter Ulbricht, turned the fact that Russians had fought on the side of Prussians in 1813 into an excuse for regarding the monument as a symbol of eternal Soviet-German friendship.

None of this fits remotely into modern Germany's self-image as a peaceful, almost self-effacing country, ashamed of its past nationalist excesses and committed to reconciliation with its neighbours.

The Leipzig museum has therefore asked the city council whether it might consider unifying the monument with other memorials across Europe in a "Union of Monuments to Peace from the Iberian Peninsula to the Volga".

The proposal seems both bizarre - how, in practice, can one "unite monuments"? - and inappropriate. For if the Leipzig memorial has anything at all to be said for it, it is that it faithfully tracks all the divergent paths, terrible and tragic though some have been, that German history has taken in this century.

There is no point trying to erase this history. Perhaps it would be better to get ahead with the repairs and put up an exhibition showing how different German political authorities have harnessed the memorial to their own propagandistic purposes.

Or perhaps the city authorities should just pull down the monument - it is, after all, exceptionally grotesque - and construct a museum or open-air site focusing solely on the theme of the Napoleonic wars and the battle of 1813. After all, the Battle of the Nations was a turning point in European history and, up to that date, the biggest battle fought on European soil.

That is why war and military costume enthusiasts popped up in Leipzig the other weekend for the battle's 185th anniversary.

Whatever the authorities do, the story of the Leipzig memorial will not be over for a long time. It offers one more proof that the harder Germans try to scale the mountain of their history, the larger that mountain seems to loom in front of them.



Arcadia

Winged gods of the desert.

Turkmenistan's horses were beloved of Alexander. Carlotta Gall understands why

My horse was clearly at home in the desert. He stepped lightly and easily through the deep, golden sand, turning his head to look across to the distant mountains and giving me a glimpse of his profile. It was enough to make you catch your breath. Proud carriage, straight nose and tall, curved ears.

He was a pure-bred Akhal-Teke stallion, one of the most ancient and noble breeds in the world, native to Turkmenistan, a remote desert land in former Soviet Central Asia on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. Prized by Alexander the Great and the Parthian kings, the Akhal-Teke has been around for 4,000 years, but is little known today, largely because of the isolation of Soviet times.

The Turkmenians are out to change that. They are inordinately proud of their horses, and have made the Akhal-Teke their national emblem. There are only about 2,000 pure-bred Akhal-Tekes in the world today, most of them in Turkmenistan, descended from just 17 bloodlines.

At the Hippodrome on the edge of the capital, Ashgabat, I was offered a ride on one of the young stallions, under training for showjumping. He was called Paikhasli, Turkmen for Charmer. His coat was a gleaming black and his movements silky light. There was something of the Arab horse in him, and the hint of an English thoroughbred. But his tall, upright neck and high head carriage were unique and a little strange. It was, I learned, the Akhal-Teke look. The mares and foals we passed lifted their heads in the same way.

I would have galloped all the way to Iran, 40km to the south, but reluctantly pulled up. We slowed to a walk by a pond of water surrounded by golden reeds. Skylarks spiralled into the air with a curious high-pitched call. We paused to test the silence and sense of space. The early morning sunlight was warm on our backs. Paikhasli stood stock still, showing an oriental calm even though

we had just been galloping. My guide, Alexander Meredev, caught up with us on his five-year-old grey stallion. "So now will you write that the Akhal-Teke is the best ride in the world?" he asked with a laugh. "And you will say that the Turkmenians want to show the world what the Akhal-Teke can do?"

Alexander is one of a team we had just been galloping. did come through the region and used the horses for his campaigns because of their endurance. The Parthian kings who ruled a vast empire from their capital Nisa, not far from Ashgabat, prized them too and developed the breed.

But one of the Akhal-Tekes' lasting contributions to history is that it was one of the forefathers of the English thoroughbred. The Darley Arabian, one of the three original sires brought to England in the 17th century, was said to have been an Akhal-Teke.

Not everyone believes it, but just looking at these horses I am convinced. The classic head of an Akhal-Teke is broad at the top, tapering to a small muzzle that should fit into your palm. Pure Stubbs.

Nowadays they race Akhal-Tekes on the sand track of the Ashgabat Hippodrome, long-backed, long-legged horses, ridden by young jockeys in very short stirrups.

They cannot touch the thoroughbred over short distances, according to Geldi Kyarizov, the director of the Hippodrome. But at 10km they are a match, and their real strength and endurance emerges over 25km or 50km when they win hands down. They have finer legs than a thoroughbred but their bones are stronger.

"They have beautiful paces, too," Kyarizov had told me, standing before a portrait of the famous stallion Karader in his office. An Akhal-Teke called Abent was three times an Olympic dressage medalist through the 1960s and 1970s. Another pure-bred was a top show-jumper. "And for breeding purposes, they will add class to any breed, even to your New Forest ponies," he said.

Arab owners have already started buying them to add stamina to their racehorses. Earlier this year at the first auction of Turkmen horses, a sheikh from Bahrain bought a young stallion for \$40,000 (£24,000). Turkmenistan's President Saparmurat Niyazov has made gifts of several to a lucky few, among them John Major, François Mitterrand, Bill Clinton, and Iran's ex-president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, whose horse notoriously deposited him on the ground.

Alexander, meanwhile, said he could find me a pure-bred for a couple of thousand. The only problem was it would cost me double treble that to ship it home.

Suddenly we were racing, his narrow legs flying out in front. I was slightly out of control but I didn't care

training Akhal-Tekes for the showjumping circuit. They were as agile as a cat, he said, gymnastic in their movements and capable of jumping over two metres. What is more they were even-tempered, intelligent and trusting.

The Akhal-Teke is traditionally known for its speed and stamina across the hot merciless Karakum, or Black Sand, desert, that makes up most of Turkmenistan. His forebears bore the Turkmen warrior tribes through centuries of wars and marauding. The Russian general Kaufman who fought them in the 19th century once called them the most formidable light cavalry in the world.

They say that Alexander the Great's beloved horse Bucephalus was an Akhal-Teke but that might just be a myth. Certainly Alexander

was a little bit of a horse lover. He was a little bit of a horse lover. He was a little bit of a horse lover.

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Excuse my French

Here are the real Muscles from Brussels

Rachel Johnson gives the low-down on the high life

People arrive here, swear they'll stay two years absolute tops and then pout! - years pass, and before you can say Jacques Santer it's pension time and roll on that little *ferme* in the South of France.

I'm not talking about the warmer-blooded eurocrats from the olive belt, who swish around the Commission in trendy aubergine jackets with the liverish complexion of Mediterranean in winter, or sit around the European Parliament's espresso bar shouting to their mistresses down mobile phones.

They don't seem to stay very long.

No, it's the British who seem determined to make their careers in Brussels, and not only because the pension arrangements for long service are so spectacular. (Did you know that, once an official hits 60, the EU doubles the value of its monthly contribution?)

There's Adrian Fortescue, who left the Foreign Office 20 years ago and has been in Brussels ever since. Now he's director-general of the third pillar - which, in normal language, means he is the top man at home affairs - but enjoys his weekends at his homes in the Ardennes and south of France.

Then there's Andrew Cahn, behind whose boyish looks appears to lurk a rapier-sharp mind, who serves as *chef de cabinet* for Neil Kinnock, the transport commissioner.

The dapper Cahn - a civil servant from the agriculture ministry handicapped to work in the private offices of John Major, William Waldegrave and Tony Blair - now pedals merrily between midweek dinner parties on a lady's bicycle, his briefcase in a backpack and flowers for his hostess blooming from the basket on his handlebars.

Another Brussels-fancier is the darkly cherubic Simon Fraser, whom many suspect

is quietly "doing a Fortescue". He sidled out of his job with the Foreign Office in Paris a couple of years ago and is reveling in the intellectual high jinks of Sir Leon Brittan's cabinet.

Yup, Brussels is absolutely groaning with contented

Cocktail parties are full of shiny, happy faces bragging about how they actually DO something with their day! They negotiate! They see results! Move over, Monsieur Claude Van Damme, Messrs Fortescue, Fraser, Cahn and co are the real Muscles from Brussels.

There are many rites of passage for the British journalist arriving in Brussels. Registering with local commune, hiring accountant, smashing up new Volvo as a result of a brush with a Belgian driver following the *priorité à droite* rule, and writing complaining articles about the hideous bureaucracy, the bad driving, the endless rain, the ubiquitous dog poo, etc etc.

If they don't get printed in the journalists' own paper, such pieces occasionally surface in the Bulletin, the English-language news weekly - which is also widely read by locals. Until quite recently, British readers would eagerly open the

magazine at the Letters Page, like wild boars hunting for truffles, hoping for a good crop of angry letters from insulted Belgians.

"If you Brits all hate Brussels so much why don't you all just bugger off back to Britain?" was a line that still causes merriment at expatriate dinner parties.

Now the fun is to come to an end. No more letters sent in anonymously from Disgusted of Waterloo will be printed, nor will formulaic articles about bad driving and red tape.

Very diplomatic. Like Washington, Brussels is full of what the Foreign Office calls trailing spouses, wives who have "sacrificed" their own careers for husband and children.

But you don't hear them grumbling. For one thing, most have reached the stage of life where shopping is a bigger part of their lives than, well, you know, and the shopping in Brussels is

sheer delight. On almost every street, there is a fromagerie, a patisserie, a boucherie, a chocolaterie and even a little shop exclusively devoted to purveying foie gras. As one Commission wife told me: "It's much nicer than Paris. I can pop into Delhaize for sushi at 8pm, the school fees are paid for, the weather's no worse than it is in London, and because everyone speaks English so perfectly I don't even have to speak French."

And, for the British mums who miss the Saturday run to Tesco's, Brussels has come up with the perfect antidote to retail homesickness: in every supermarket you can find a Taste of England section, filled with a mouthwatering selection of British delicacies.

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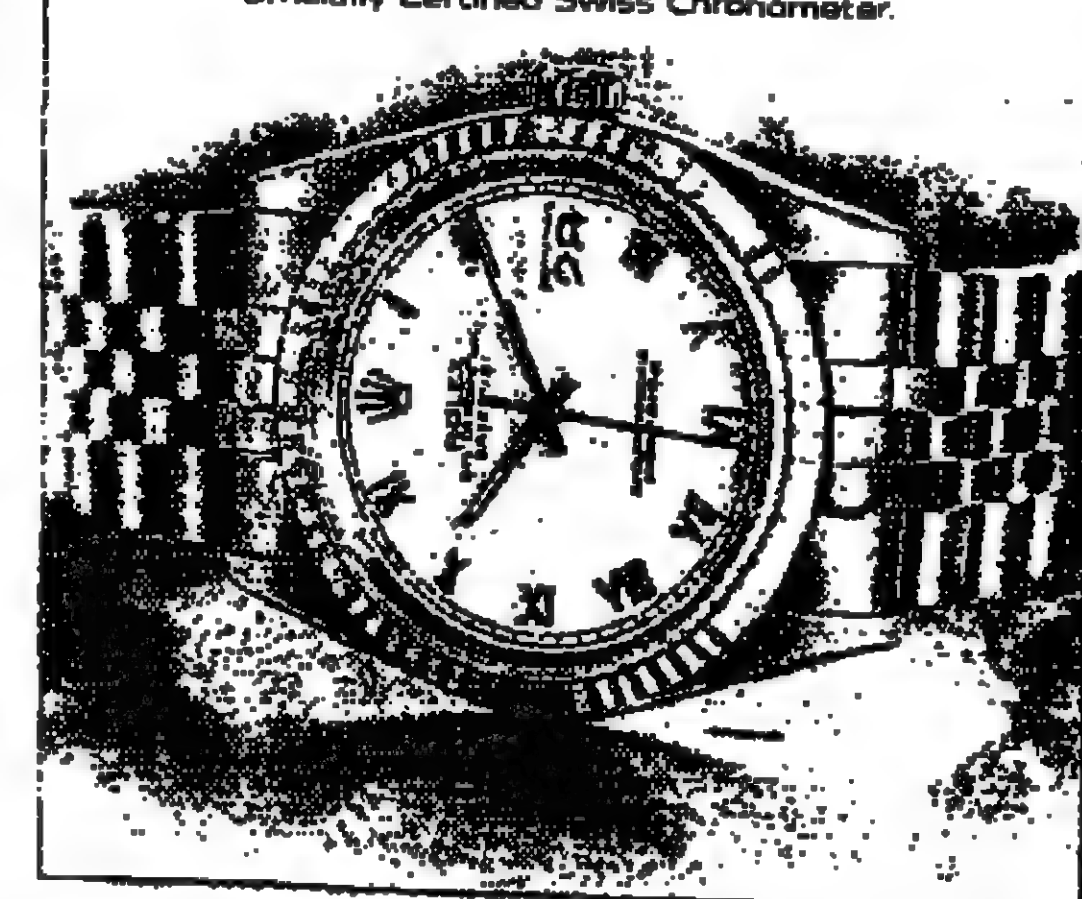
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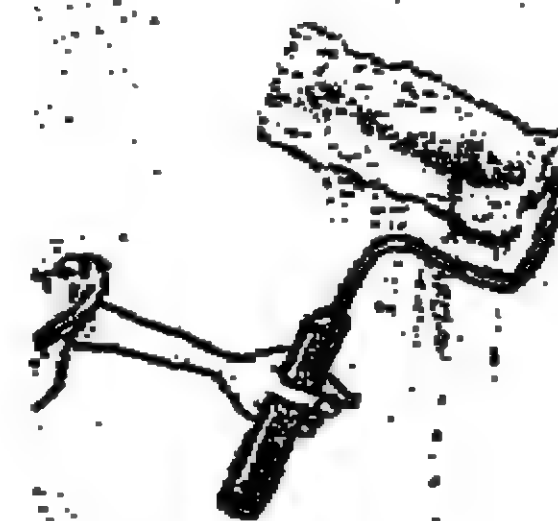
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Unlearned lessons

'We saw on our tour that developers have made the same five basic mistakes as they did 10 years ago'

Page 2



Painting mad

'What were we discussing? Violence? Drugs? Sex? No, just the craze among the young for decorating their rooms'

Page 6



On the move

'Belgravia, SW1, is always pricey, whether you are buying a whole house or a pub'

Page 9

Marching down again

Prices in the capital have fallen from all-time peaks. Anne Spackman looks at what their next move might be

First, the good news. If you own a property in London, it is almost certainly worth far more than you paid for it, unless you are a very recent purchaser.

Now, the bad news. It is equally likely to be worth less now than nine months ago and its value may fall further over the winter.

Most honest estate agents say values have fallen on average by between 5 and 10 per cent from their peak. In some cases, the falls appear to be 20 or even 30 per cent, but that is usually where the original asking price was ludicrously ambitious.

This downturn in the market comes against a background of substantial growth. Central London property prices rose by almost 100 per cent from the end of 1992 to the end of 1997. Areas beyond the prime heartlands continued to see some growth in spring this year.

But in July the entire market hit the buffers. The first news of redundancies in the UK for several years, coupled with turmoil on the world's stock markets, stopped the property market in its tracks.

November has seen a slight improvement, as the feared global meltdown failed to materialise, but most central London estate agents say they do not expect to see more than a handful of sales this year.

FPDSavills recorded the first fall for six years in its central London index in the third quarter of this year.

Officially it predicts a further two per cent off in the fourth quarter, followed by a further five per cent, mostly in the early part of next year. This comes from the only team which correctly predicted London's boom.

As figures from the Nationwide Building Society show, London property has become too expensive.

REGION BY REGION

On pages 2-5, Anne Spackman examines the market in and around London

sive. Greater London and the outer Metropolitan area are the only two parts of the UK where prices are above their long-term trend. London prices are now at a 20 per cent premium to the rest of the south-east - the same level recorded in the boom of the late 1990s.

Although the Nationwide measures prices across London well below peak 1990s levels in real terms, there are some exceptions. Detailed studies by London Residential Research show that some new properties in prime locations such as Kensington have exceeded 1990s prices, even taking into account inflation.

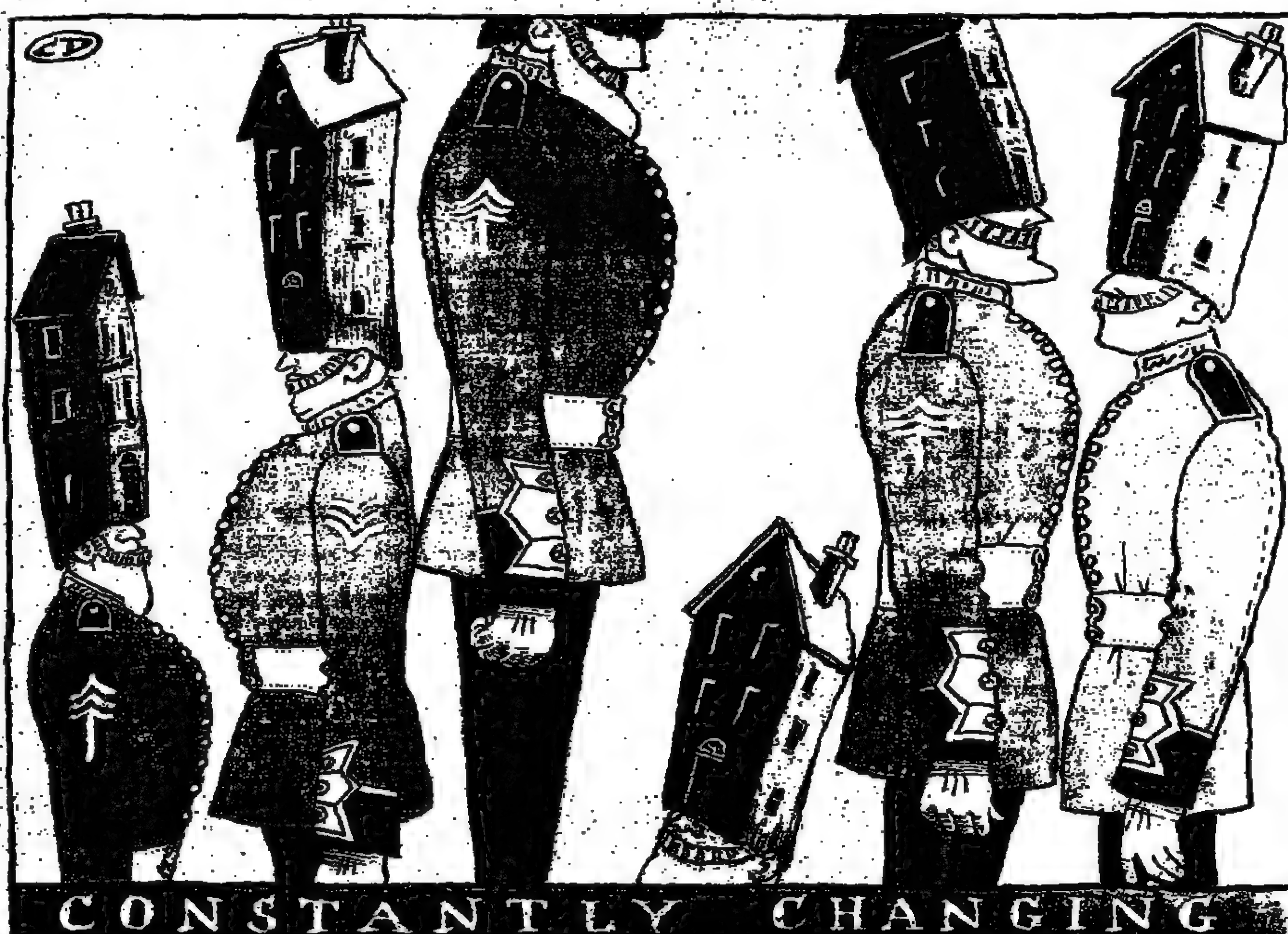
The very top of the market appears to have been hit hardest. Sales over the £2m mark have virtually stopped; at this level all purchases are discretionary and almost all purchasers are abroad. Although new developments have, predictably, suffered, they do not look any more overpriced than some of the grandest, second-hand properties.

The Kensington townhouse priced at £2.5m (which was worth less than £1m in 1993), is expected to need a similar price cut to achieve a sale as the flat in a converted office block in Docklands.

Some estate agents are complaining that the market has been ruined by talk of gloom and doom, rather than genuinely worsening economic circumstances. Whether fears of a recession are well-founded or not, many buyers have decided to wait and see what next year will bring.

And what will it bring? There are fewer doom-mongers in the property world than there were a few weeks ago, largely because of the performance of world stock markets. The most commonly held view among experts is that price falls will be short and sharp over the autumn and winter.

Once that correction has taken place, they believe buyers will come back in, attracted by lower prices and cheaper borrowing. If there is further economic turmoil, however, the market could be in for a longer and deeper slump.



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A NASTY HANGOVER

Some developers just never seem to learn

Yolande Barnes, of FPD Savills, lists a catalogue of unlearned lessons from the last big property downturn

The residential research team at FPD Savills recently ventured out of its ivory tower to see some real bricks and mortar in the form of London's largest and most prestigious developments. This is what it found and the lessons it thinks should be learned everywhere.

The UK housing market has changed. A lack of confidence that characterised the doldrum years of the early and mid 1990s is returning. Fears of recession and redundancy are affecting would-be housebuyers. Although the market had not become as overheated as it was in 1989 there are some uncomfortable similarities between now and then - especially in London.

The central London development market has seen the greatest change in market conditions. Developers in London had been enjoying boom conditions until the end of last year. Now turnover, and even asking prices, are down.

The trouble with boom conditions is that they make developers complacent. We saw on our tour that developers have made the same five basic mistakes as they did 10 years ago: inadequate marketing effort; poor presentation; low quality; overpricing; paying too much for land.

We found few cases where all five mistakes were being made simultaneously but often more than one rule had been broken. High quality workmanship and the best show flats in town will not make a development sell if the prices are still too high. Similarly, even the best-value apartments will have a low rate of sale if buyers cannot get to see them at convenient times.

Inadequate Marketing Effort

If these issues are addressed now, the painful downward market spiral that characterised most of the early 1990s may be avoided. Developers outside

London still have time to learn from London's mistakes and to avoid them.

The most striking feature of our tour was the immense difficulty we had in actually getting in to see any of the properties we wanted to look at. A Friday morning is not an unusual time to want to view properties. Buyers have been known to spend long weekends house hunting.

Yet, it was not until we had visited five major sites that we could even get into a marketing suite. This was on a large, high profile site - but manned at the time by just one person. Having made it this far, we were then told that the only two show properties on the site were unavailable for viewing.

Poor Presentation

Advertising-induced expectations are expensive to achieve. They shouldn't be dashed simply by an inability to see the product. When visiting the potential

house of their dreams and expecting to pay some of the highest prices per square foot in the world today, buyers do not like to struggle over piles of rubble to the sound of pneumatic drills while choking on brick dust.

When inside, they expect to be overwhelmed by quality fittings, solid floors, wall to wall marble, scented flowers and gentle music; not plastic baths, matchbox walls, tiles from B&Q and enough dust on the furniture to horrify even the cast of Men Behaving Badly.

Quality

Municipal-style, fast architecture, flimsy walls and floors, shoddy workmanship, mean skirtings and no cornices: it happened in the 1980s and it has happened again.

Easy, off-plan sales to overseas investors and a strong underlying domestic market, coupled with a scarcity of sites has led to the impression that units sell themselves. Buyers

used to take units before even a brick had been laid.

This is the case no longer. Buyers have become much more discerning and are sniffing disdainfully at the units now completed to the more lackadaisical standards of the easy-to-sell era.

Overpricing

London price rises have been well in excess of the rest of the UK. Central London now looks very fully valued by historic standards. Asking prices on new developments, as always, have been at the cutting edge of these price rises. In 1990, there was a 5 per cent discount on new-build property.

By the summer of 1997, there was an average premium of about 30 per cent for a new-build property over the value of the equivalent second hand property. New property in less-prime locations is now overpriced.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to work this one out.

There are more trendy young professionals earning £40,000 a year and prepared to pay £120,000 for a small and rather indifferent flat in Clerkenwell than there are earning £23,500 and willing to spend the more commonly asked £250,000. There are lots of new flats in Clerkenwell. Even the faintest knowledge of supply and demand should lead to an inevitable conclusion on this one.

Paying too much for land

The problem for developers is that they are forced sellers. Unlike owner occupiers who can, in the main, stay put for a few years until the market comes round again, house builders have to shift their stock. The sooner developers can accept the difference between their asking prices and true market value, the sooner their rate of sale will rise again. Yes, it has happened again.



Enthusiastic latecomers to the top of the market London party got carried away. They started putting price projections into their cash-flow models.

Will they never learn that this can cause a particularly nasty hangover? Some are now left with schemes that simply won't sell for these inflated prices. Meanwhile, building costs are soaring and sales are down.

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in Building Homes magazine.

New developments

Insecurity in the jobs market holds the key

Anne Spackman sees an underlying pattern among the winners and losers

Some of the most expensive apartments ever to be offered for sale in London were launched in Chelsea in September, the very worst month the London property market has seen for years. Within four weeks, all except one were sold.

Painter's Yard, Richard Collins' development, offered excellent quality in an excellent location. Its success is evidence that there is still plenty of money around for what buyers consider outstanding property.

Across London at City Quay in St Katharine's Dock, Taylor Woodrow also has a success story to tell. Its apartments provide good quality, in an attractive setting, in a location where buyers are unlikely to find anything similar. Strong sales have encouraged them to put their prices up recently - though they are still only around half the level of Painter's Yard.

St Katharine's is on the eastern edge of the City of London, in one of the untold residential areas expected to bear the brunt of

this year's downturn. Its success shows that, in the current market, an established location is not the key to survival. As Robin Paterson of Hamptons International says: "Prime has not done better than secondary. What is selling is what the public perceives to be good value."

Evidence from struggling developments in prime areas bears out his statement. Two of the most high-profile schemes which have failed to attract buyers this year are Earl's Terrace in Kensington and Mount Vernon in Hampstead.

Developer Northacre, which has a history of achieving premium prices, has sold only three of its 23 terraced houses off Kensington High Street, which it launched 18 months ago at prices of up to £3.75m. Its response has been to raise prices further.

At Mount Vernon, where 44 of the 69 apartments remained unsold this summer, the developer took the opposite course of action. It reduced prices by 15 per cent last month and did half a dozen deals within a fortnight.

It has also been a tough year for Montevetro, Richard Rogers' high-profile, high-rise block near Battersea on the south bank of the Thames. That has only seen 11 sales in the past 12 months, although - unlike the above schemes - it is still a long way from completion.

At the other end of the spectrum, Wimpey Homes has halted construction on the more expensive section of its Britannia Village development at the easternmost point of Docklands. Prices for the flats were to range up to £300,000.

Asking prices for many new properties have fallen by about 10 per cent. Developers still struggling to sell are unlikely to reduce them further officially, for fear of chasing the market down.

Instead, they are adding incentives, such as free parking spaces or carpets or guaranteed rental returns. They are also taking offers. In the case of bulk buyers, that can mean as much as 25 per cent off the peak asking price.

Developers are also talking to their banks. So far they are getting a sympathetic hearing. "We are dealing with people who went through the last recession," says Stephen Miles-Brown of

In the City, large flats are the hardest to sell, while in Westminster anything unspectacular lacks buyers

Knight Frank. "They see the problems as being short-term and are taking a grown-up view."

The key short-term problem is one of over-supply and high prices. In the 18 months from July this year to the end of 1999 more than 10,000 homes are due for completion in central London.

Prices for new flats - which form the bulk of the supply - have risen by more than 20 per cent a year for two years. Much of that inflation has been supported by overseas buying.

Geoff Marsh of London Residential Research, the leading experts on the new-build market, expects to see price changes of between plus five and minus 25 per cent. Much of that has already happened.

The most buoyant market sector at the moment is the bottom end. One-bedroom flats and any two-bedders below £200,000 are selling far better than flats in the £200,000-£700,000 range.

It is no coincidence that St George, part of the Berkeley Homes group, pitched its two-bedroom flats at Riverside West on the Thames below the £200,000 mark, whereas 12 months ago it might have asked £235,000.

Tom Marshall of Cluttons, who is based at Butler's



Painter's Yard, Chelsea: money is still available for the very best



Inside a Painter's Yard apartment: the quality that ensured the demand

which has seen it out-perform areas such as the City and Westminster.

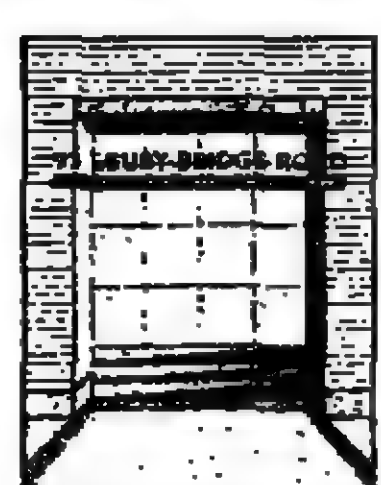
In the City, large flats and penthouses are the hardest properties to sell, while in Westminster, anything unspectacular - in anything other than price - is struggling to find takers.

There are plenty of agents and developers insisting that the new homes market will recover quickly as interest rates fall. That wise old man of property, Tony Pidgley of Berkeley Homes, thinks they

are missing the point.

"It's great that interest rates are not at 15 per cent," he says. "It's fantastic news that they are falling. But if you are frightened of losing your job, you are not going to buy a new home. It is all a question of confidence."

Probably the best news for the new development market in London is that the Berkeley group is still buying land - at the right price - and Pidgley himself has been making the odd investment purchase.



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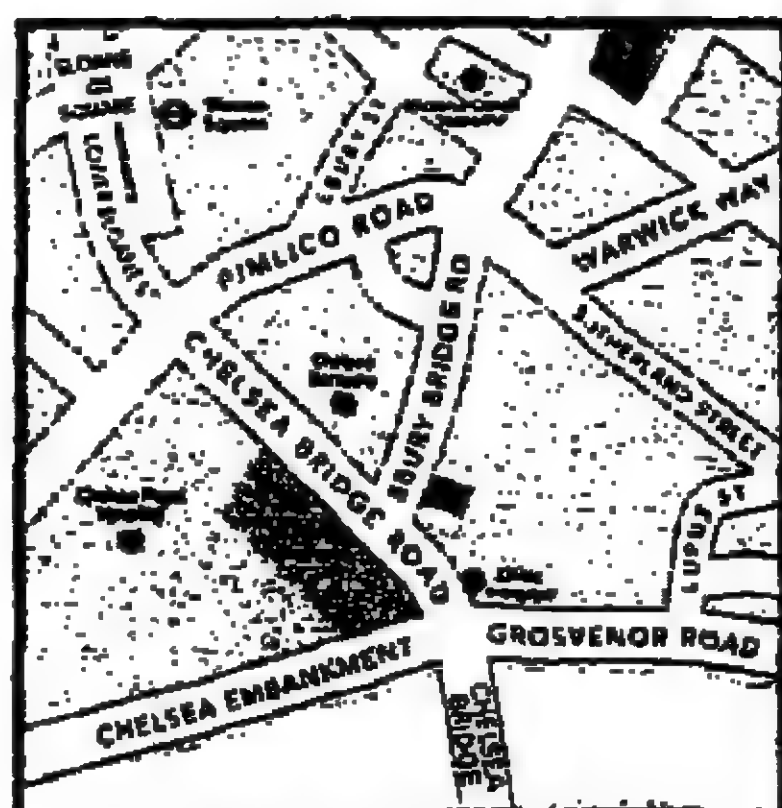
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The rabbits staring into the headlights

Buyers and sellers in some of the most prestigious areas don't know whether to sit tight or bolt for cover, writes Anne Spackman

The unwritten law of property downturns is that buyers retrench into prime areas. So far, that is not happening. It is in places such as Kensington and Knightsbridge that up-market estate agents are sitting with empty appointment diaries.

What was a sellers' market 12 months ago is now a buyers' market. But there are few buyers to be found.

They have disappeared for two reasons: first, prices have risen too high - above late 1980s levels in real terms for many properties. Second, the market is dominated by foreign and City-based buyers, currently the two most vulnerable groups of purchasers. A good rule of thumb for vendors assessing the value of their property is to measure its exposure to these two markets and subtract accordingly.

Figures from FPD Savills show that one third of all purchasers and more than 80 per cent of tenants in prime central London in 1997 were foreign nationals. With prices high, the pound strong and recession in many parts of the globe, that source of activity has been drying up.

In addition, almost two-thirds of last year's buyers were making a discretionary purchase; they were either buying an additional home or an investment. It is easy to see why such buyers are not active when their own cash position and the property market are both worsening.

Sales above the £2m mark have virtually stopped at a time when supply has increased sharply. London Residential Research calculates that in the new-build sector alone 94 properties are either for sale or nearing

completion at this price level in the smart west London postcode areas. When second-hand properties are taken into account that is enough supply to meet about six years' worth of demand.

Supply of all kinds of property has increased sharply this year, as vendors hoped to catch the crest of the price wave. Howard Elston

Up-market estate agents are sitting with empty appointment diaries

of Strutt and Parker points out that buyers of family houses at around £1.5m would now have 25 to choose from where last year they had five. The best one or two will still sell for a good price, but the rest are likely to stick.

Prime central London is the one place where most sellers and estate agents

have already come to accept that prices have fallen. Elston says the last couple of months have produced the first calls from sellers saying "get me an offer".

Real values appear to have fallen around 10 per cent from their peak - plus any inflation built into this year's asking price. Saul Emmons of John D Wood says a house priced at £1m 12 months ago would probably have sold for a bit more under competition. Now it would get 5 to 10 per cent below that figure - but the asking price might be another 10 per cent higher.

Those sales which are going through tend to be at the lower end of the price range. John D Wood in Kensington says it has achieved two relatively quick sales on houses in the £800,000 price range.

But with few vendors forced to sell, few deals are taking place. Justin Holder of Winkworth in Kensington says the period from offer to exchange has more than doubled, as buyers shop around.

The good news for vendors

is that several agents report a slight improvement in the market this month, as stock markets have stabilised rather than crashed. Willie Gething, of the buying agency Property Vision, said his predominantly business and city-based clients were in freeze-frame throughout September and October. In the first week of November he was asked to buy five houses at between £1m and £2m.

He says buyers will only do deals where they are convinced they are buying at next year's prices. "That usually means 15 to 20 per cent less than the highest price achieved in the area," he says.

Robin Peterson of Hamptons International believes some of the best bargains are to be had in the heartlands of Belgravia and Mayfair. "Short lease property has fallen in value by between 20 and 30 per cent," he says. "Investors can buy flats on 15 and 20 year leases for less than £150,000."

Those considering snapping up such properties need to look carefully at the rental market. Hamptons is one of the agents honest enough to admit that the rental market in many areas is already over-supplied.

There is also the crucial question of when the market will bottom out. Almost all commentators see the fate of prime central London property as inextricably bound up with movements in world economies. FPD Savills has just produced a graph showing the relationship between the two.

If markets stay stable, the bottom may already have been hit. If there are more falls, or further headline-making redundancies, confidence and prices are likely to slip further.



Number 80, Old Church Street, SW3: sold by John D Wood for more than £500,000

For sellers it has been a difficult few months. With Christmas only five weeks away they have to decide whether to take their house off the market, sit out the quiet times or reduce their asking price.

Doing the latter seems the first course of action for anyone whose property is priced above levels previously achieved in their area. But it will not necessarily achieve a sale.

Many agents are advising

that lack of buyer confidence rather than high prices is the key cause of the present stagnation. As Ed Mead of Douglas and Gordon in Chelsea says: "If you don't have to move, stay where you are."

To sum it up:

Dick Ford, head of Knight Frank, Kensington, says: "The economic woes of Asia and then Russia scared

people into believing a calamity might lurk around the corner.

"The effect on the property market can be likened to rabbits staring into headlights - not knowing whether it is safer to sit still or bolt for cover."

"The market has slowed, with purchasers deferring making decisions and vendors uncertain whether to hold steady or lower their expectations. For most the jury is still out."

"On the one hand, prices remain in a comfortable ratio to incomes (even in Kensington). Interest rates seem set for further falls and there is little likelihood of the level of 'distressed' sellers arising rapidly."

"On the other hand, recent events remind purchasers that painful employment may be ephemeral and they recall that those who bought in 1989 might have been well advised to wait until 1992."

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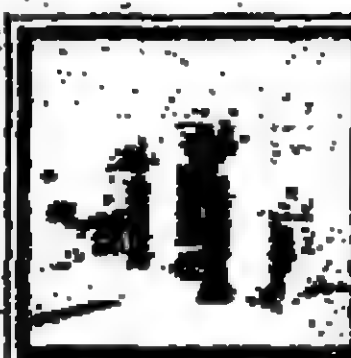
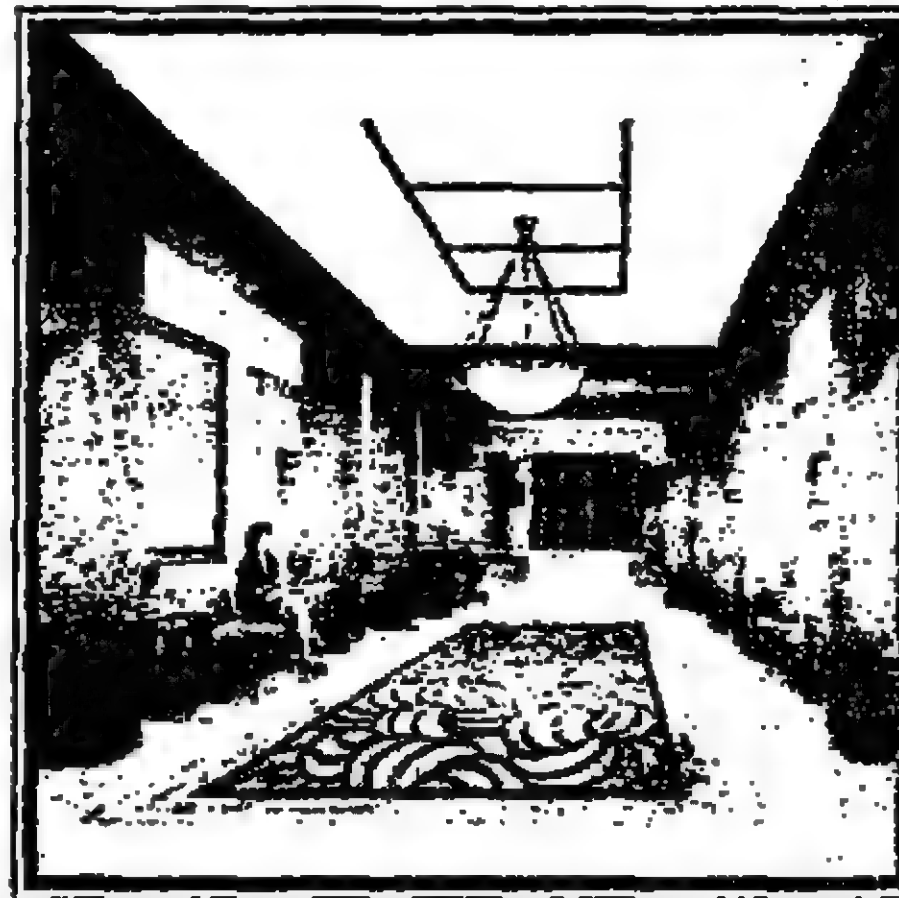
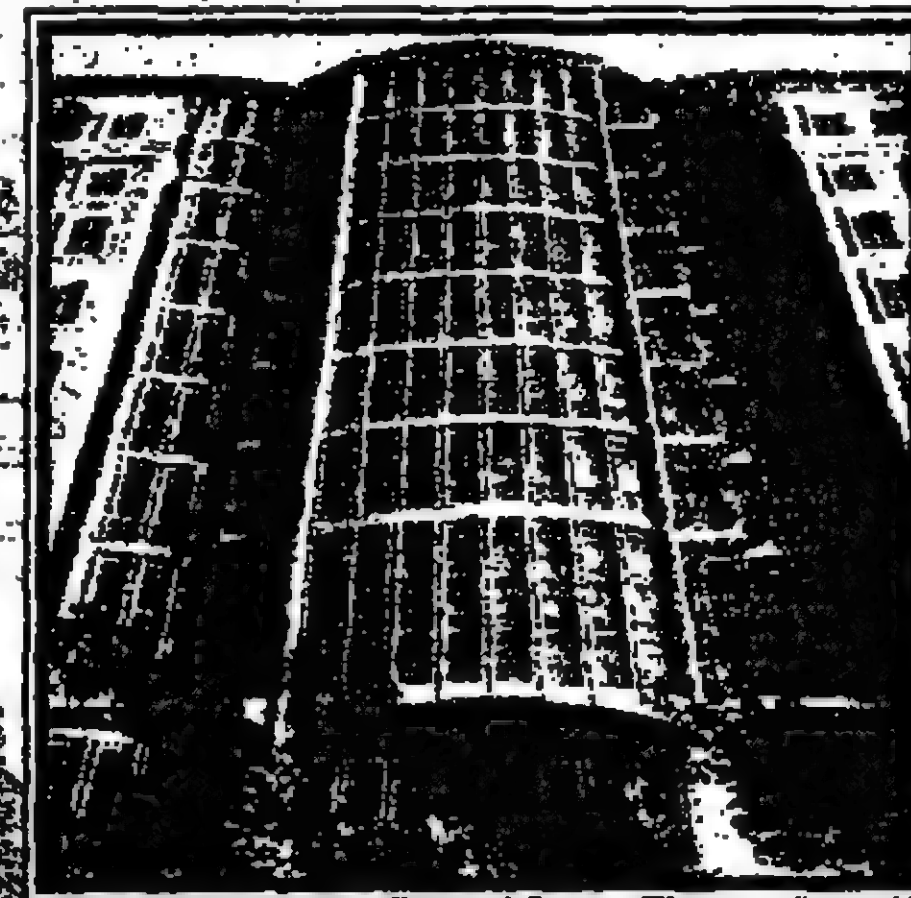


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Bentley Manor, Stanmore: offers at 10-15 per cent below the £2.5m asking price but the agents expect a sale before Christmas

COMMUTER LAND: including Guildford, Esher, Ascot, Beaconsfield

A light breeze blows out of the capital

Anne Spackman discovers far less nervousness a short train ride from London

The wind of change blowing out of the capital has only just started to reach the commuter heartlands. Most agents say prices have come off their spring-time peak - by up to 10 per cent - but there is nothing like the level of nervousness seen in central London.

The vulnerable sector of the market appears to be the £1m-£1.5m bracket. Robin Paterson of Hamptons says houses which quickly shot up in value to £1.25m in areas such as St George's Hill, Weybridge, are now more likely to sell for around £1m.

Special houses - even very expensive ones - are selling well. Knight Frank in Esher managed three sales in three weeks in October at between £2m and £4m. The key to these sales was that all the houses were either brand new or in excellent condition.

Closer to London, a vast house in Stanmore priced at £2.5m in October attracted two offers within weeks at 10-15 per cent below the asking price. All the interest has been from UK buyers and agents Knight Frank expects a deal to be done before Christmas.

Anthony Wardell of Knight Frank in Ascot speaks for many when he says: "Good quality property in the best locations is selling at good prices, but it does have to be in excellent condition: either newly built or of the highest standard."

The market is reported to be stronger around the £500,000 mark than it is around £1m in most commuter areas. However, Hamptons in Guildford reports two cases of private sales at around £800,000. Many agents expect private sales to become a feature of the winter market.

If one goes as far along the railway line as Winchester

there are still examples of good houses being snapped up within days of coming on the market. Knight Frank recently sold a listed farmhouse with indoor swimming pool priced at £385,000 in less than a week. Now is not a good time to be moving out of London to the country.

To sum it up:

Colin Fitzgerald, Hamptons in Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, says:

"The market is very patchy. Guildford is still very good. October definitely saw a resurgence in activity, with lots more offers, though sales arranged are down."

"Offers are averaging 10-15 per cent below asking price, moving up to 7-10 per cent before agreeing a sale. Special houses - such as Georgian rectories - are still selling well and always will."



Inside Bentley Manor: all the interest has come from UK buyers

London Life

Village on the southern heights

Gerald Cadogan surveys the increasingly desirable residences of Clapham Common

The prime residential areas of Clapham in south London are the network of streets that flank its 230 acres of common land.

They contain many Georgian and Victorian Gothic houses, as well as a few Queen Anne residences and more modern homes.

Thanks to its local tube stations Clapham enjoys easier access to the West End and City than, say, Fulham. Its public spaces give it a village atmosphere.

Unlike Hackney in east London, relatively few of Clapham's terraced streets were pulled down after the war to create council estates.

Around the Common, the prime area centres on Old Town, Clapham's old village square, Rectory Grove and the small terraced streets between the High Street and Larkhall Rise which follows the ridge overlooking Battersea and the Thames. (In Larkhall Rise, Hamptons has houses on offer at £450,000 and £457,950.)

Old Town boasts several new shops and restaurants. "Three years ago many of the commercial units were empty," says Guy Foster of agent Friend & Falcke. Now he awaits a similar revival in the High Street.

Clapham's popularity rose in the 1990s as buyers, including young professionals, sought houses and flats that were cheaper than those north of the Thames.

As a result, Clapham is today too expensive for first time buyers looking for a flat in the £125,000 to £135,000 range, says Tony D'Alton of Knight Frank.

They are likely to find that vendors want £145,000 to £175,000. So now they trek east to Brixton, which is

becoming more popular. House prices have probably plateaued, says John Thwaites of Richard Oakey, "or at any rate asking prices are not going up, and sellers have stopped looking at what the neighbours sold for and adding on a bit".

North of the High Street a restored Victorian terraced cottage in Turret Grove for £315,000, and Bernard Marcus a similar cottage for £305,000 in Broadhinton Road. On Rectory Grove, at about double the price, developer Eastbank has restored a brace of semi-detached mid 19th Century white stucco houses listed grade II - one is still available at £350,000.

On Clapham Common South Side (it is actually on the southeastern angle of the common), the turn of the century Dutch-style 76 South Side is for sale through John D Wood for £795,000.

A premier street behind South Side is Abbeville Road, where a second floor flat in number 12 costs £199,950 from Hamptons. Another is Crescent Grove, where the top floor flat in number 29 costs £240,000 (with a share of the freehold) from Friend & Falcke.

In Kings Avenue, in the Clapham Park area, a between the wars terraced house with three bedrooms is for sale from Richard Oakey for £205,000. It needs some work, but still seems good value compared to much of London.

Eastbank, 0181-521 8588; Foxtons, 0171-801 1111; Friend & Falcke, 0171-498 0736; Hamptons, 0171-498 8636; Knight Frank, 0171-824 8171; Richard Oakey, 0171-720 5915; John D Wood, 0171-226 0174



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DINNER PARTY TOPICS

A decade ago

We've seen it all before

Anne Spackman looks back to the last property slowdown but finds few parallels with today's

Dinner party conversation is no good a barometer of the housing market as any formal index. In central London, where there is still no real bubble about the property market, it has just doubled in two years.

But only when it comes to house prices, the market is good. The last time house prices in the south-east of England fell for the past two years was in the early 1990s. Most people who bought a house in London before 1992 have seen its value nearly double. In the last year, house prices in the south-east have risen by 10 per cent.

The boom has been short and sharp. In the last year, house prices in the south-east have risen by 10 per cent. In the last year, house prices in the south-east have risen by 10 per cent.

Decorating
Home rule for the young generation
Vicky Carlstrand looks on in amazement at the children who are transforming their rooms

Personally I think that it only goes to prove the pernicious effect of television. I spluttered into the telephone after a trying weekend with the offspring. "Oh," said my friend at the other end, "don't you think it's the result of having liberal, hippy parents who let their children do pretty much what they like?"

What were we discussing? Violence? Drugs? Sex? No, just the current craze among the young for decorating their own rooms in a, shall we say, original and distinctive style.

My daughter's room had already recently acquired a biotchy, blue ceiling (the sky) and vivid green floorboards (the grass). Over the weekend I had watched, and even helped, paint trees to grow on the walls which were then painstakingly adorned with brightly coloured birds.

And I knew that the object she most coveted for her 11th birthday was a bright blue, blow-up plastic chair which was somehow to be assimilated into this tropical scene.

As far as I was concerned this could all be blamed on those decorating programmes on the television where perfectly respectable rooms are transformed instantly into studies of Moroccan or Indian or passionate decadence at the 1960s.

I've my eight-year-old, her room influenced, demanding an army theme for his room. No sooner had some bright spark in the family come up with the idea of hanging a camouflage net from his ceiling, than his older siblings discovered one, at the knock down price of

£25, in a dubious shop down the road selling second world war memorabilia. With Britain's longest running children's programme, the well loved Blue Peter, now getting in on the decorating act, this whole youth craze is set to spin totally out of control.

Take the Taylor family, for example. On the outside there is nothing to distinguish their London house from the rest of the terrace. Inside, there is one decorating-mad 15-year-old. Sophie has already made her room over twice and is about to start all over

again. She is a true enthusiast and loves decorating.

When she was aged 12, her bedroom was a "mature and sophisticated" purple. "I wanted it to look grown up," she explains. At 13, she dived into a more minimalist approach, although according to her mother this does not always mean that she tidies everything away off the floor.

The walls of her room are a cool cream while the woodwork and tiles around the fireplace are in splashes of green, blue, yellow and pink based on a Patrick Heron painting. There is very little furniture, a built-in corner desk, chest of drawers, bed and a futon rolled up as a sofa.

All this is to change. The

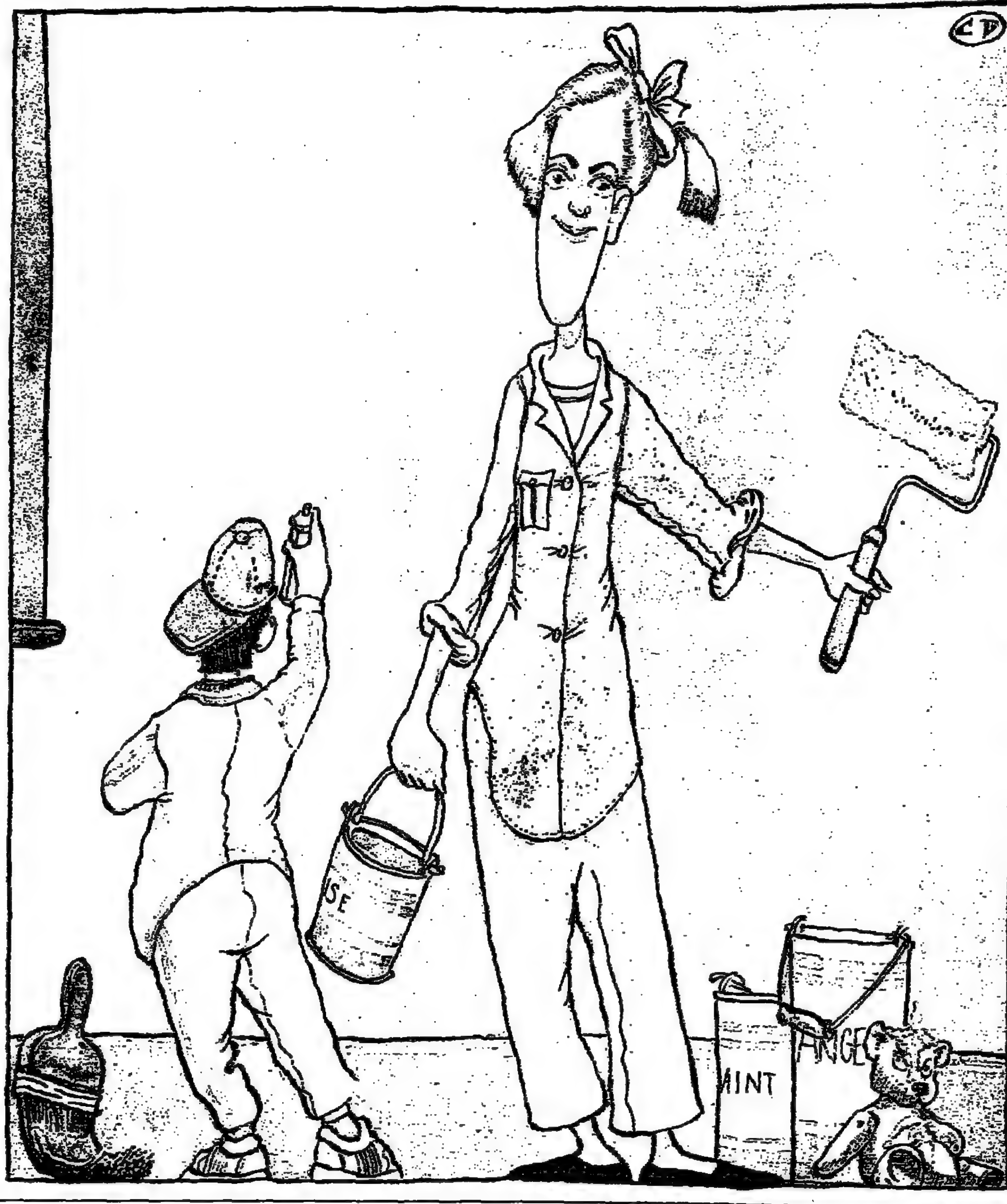
walls are to become bright orange, shading from dark at the top to light at the bottom. The windows will be purple, and turquoise will also be introduced. I grimaced visibly but Sophie was unabashed. Only two things will remain unchanged: the pages from The Diary of Adrian Mole which are pasted on to the back of her cupboard door and the stylish chest of drawers, painted a shocking pink and decorated with cut-outs from wrapping paper.

In the next room her younger brother, Jamie, has no plans to change his decor again. This is probably just as well as the decorative silver paint with which he sprayed his walls two years ago has still not dried. It tends to rub off on anything or anyone that brushes against it. Luckily much of it is covered with an impressive collection of road signs.

Across the garden wall you can just see into a neighbour's room, its window covered in brightly coloured graffiti. So, apparently are the walls.

And Sophie described another friend's room in which the colours are based on a Matisse painting and includes an archway hang with fairy lights which, she tells me, are very popular with her age group.

When I ask Sophie why she wants to change her room again she looks around and replies simply that "none of this stuff is mine". It is obvious what she means. She has outgrown her ideas of a few years ago and wants to change her room to suit the new Sophie. And she is prepared to get out the paint pots and get down to work.



London Life

Islington quality for half the price

Gerald Cadogan looks at period houses in Hackney, an area that is improving rapidly

Go east to Hackney if you want a Georgian or Victorian house but cannot afford fashionable Blightie Islington. Its fine properties are perennially under-rated, its living costs are lower and its general quality is unprovingly smart.

In the 11th and 18th centuries Hackney was a smart, rich village on higher ground west of the River Lea and its eponymous marshland. In the 19th century, its population soared and it became part of London.

Many of Hackney's imposing period houses survived the blitz and post-war redevelopment and currently can be had for less than half the price of homes in Islington - a good family house can be had for just £200,000.

Hackney is full of surprises. The streets are multicultural, with a dizzying abundance of Turkish shops and restaurants. There are also many other ethnic or religious groups - Chinese, African, Greek, Jewish - with their own shops, restaurants and places of worship.

Life has improved considerably over the last five years, says Nathan Field of Winkworth, The Round Chapel on Lower Clapton

Road, an imposing ashlar non-conformist preacher's paradise of 1871, is being converted into a centre for the arts. He claims there are also good places to eat, and last week the Hackney Empire, the famous music hall, hosted a festival of baroque music (its Christmas offering will be Dick Whittington).

The grey concrete social housing of the 1950s Kingshold estate is being pulled down to make way for what will become New Kingshold. But the friendly 1930s blocks across the road will stay intact. Liverpool Street and the City are only 10 to 15 minutes away. With so many buses and railway lines, "the lack of the Tube is not a problem", says Field.

Away from the council estates, there is still a lively amalgam of Georgian, Victorian and early 20th century buildings, and plenty of open spaces. On Mare Street, which has the Empire and Hackney Town Hall (a 1930s piece of New Deal type architecture), the old houses stand behind the shop fronts. One Georgian terrace survives.

Central Hackney, around Clapton Square, St John's church and the National Trust's Sutton

House, is a prime area. The church sits in a large square and its churchyard contains rows of prosperous 18th century chest tombs.

Sutton House on Homerton High Street is the oldest surviving house in the East End - it was built in 1535 by Sir Rafe Sadleir, Henry VIII's principal secretary of state. Besides being open to the public, it is one of the

for £350,000 (needing work) from Bunch & Duke. An end of terrace house in nearby Mehetabel Road is on offer for £169,995 from Shaw & Co.

Winkworth is selling two Victorian mid-terrace houses in St John's Church Road, next to the churchyard, at £195,000 and £205,000. Or pay just £265,000 for a one bedroom flat in the Strand Building, the conversion of a 1930s Art Deco London Electricity property.

Prices are even lower in Clapton, immediately east of central Hackney, although they have been rising. A three bedroom Victorian terrace cottage costs around £125,000, 30 per cent more than 18 months ago, says Field.

Winkworth estimates that prices for this type of property in Hackney as a whole (which includes Stoke Newington) range from £95,000 to £190,000. No wonder that demand for them comes from Islington (where something similar costs from £250,000 to £600,000), or the City and its northern fringe. A four bedroom Victorian house in Powerscroft Road in the Clapton area is for sale from Winkworth for £155,000.

A little to the south lies Victoria Park, the East End's main public open space, designed in the middle of the last century around the eastern end of the Regent's Canal.

Houses around the park command a premium. In Southborough Road Winkworth offers a Victorian house for £250,000 (Shaw has another there, under offer, at the same asking price, and a house in Groombridge Road at £205,000).

An unusual recent offering is a 1920s Arts and Crafts brick house in Meynell Gardens, "built for the Jewish cantors", says Field. The price from Winkworth is £255,000. Closer to Islington, Shaw is selling a Victorian house in Greenwood Road in the London Fields area for £280,000. "In Islington it would be £300,000," says the firm's Warren Shaw.

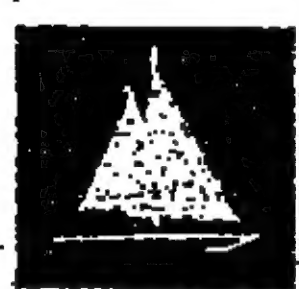
Agents: Bunch & Duke, 0181-986 3521; Shaw & Co, 0181-986 7227; Winkworth, 0181-986 4216. Hackney Empire box office: 0181-985 2424. Sutton House (0181-986 2264) is open to visitors today (2pm-5.30pm), and tomorrow and Wednesday, (11.30am-5.30pm), after which it shuts until February 3 1999. Other activities (shop, cafe, music, art exhibitions, and a Tudor banquet on December 12) will continue.



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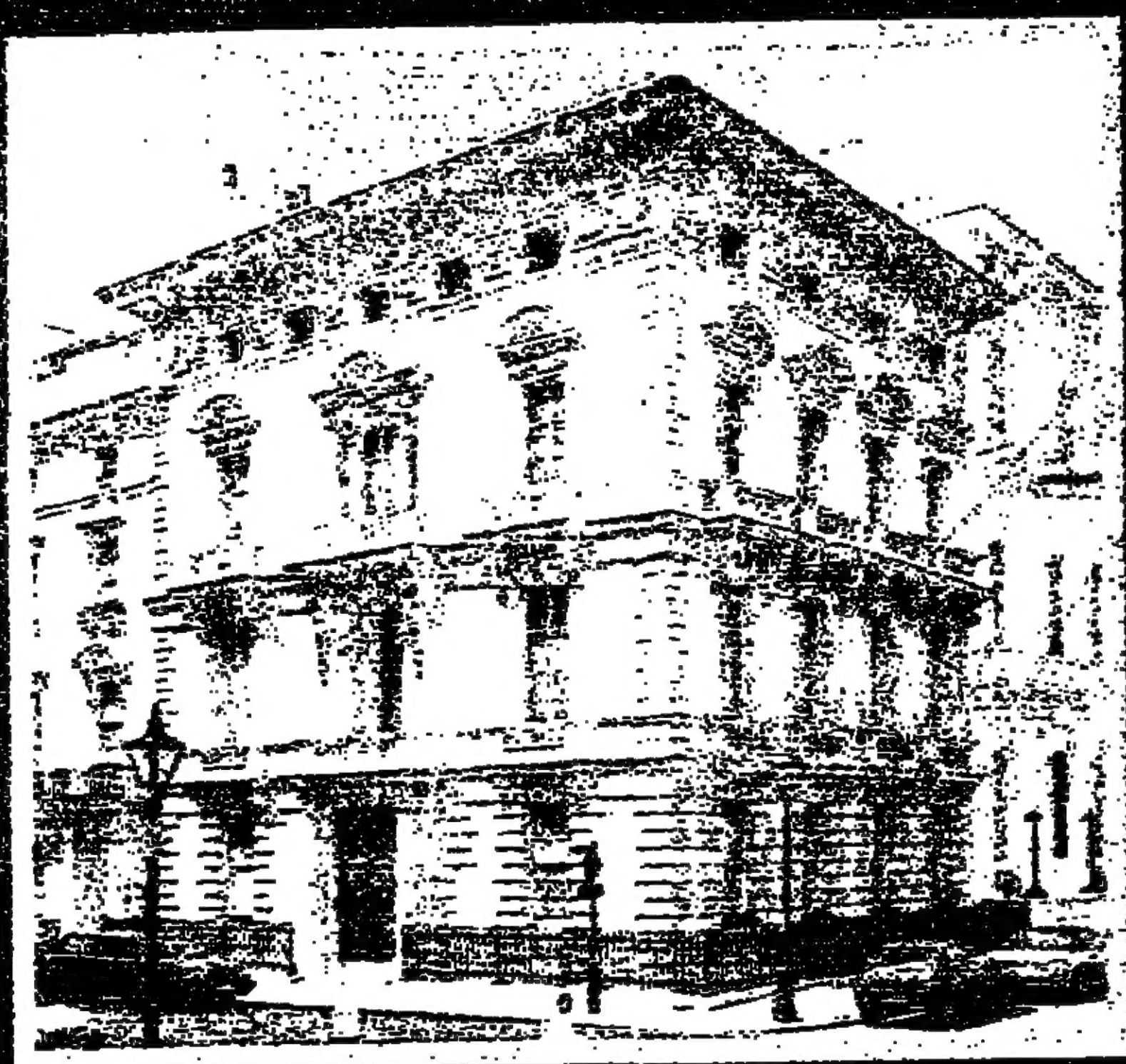
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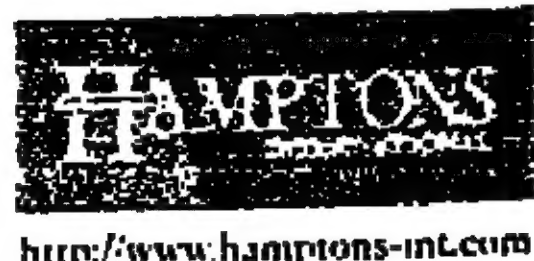
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